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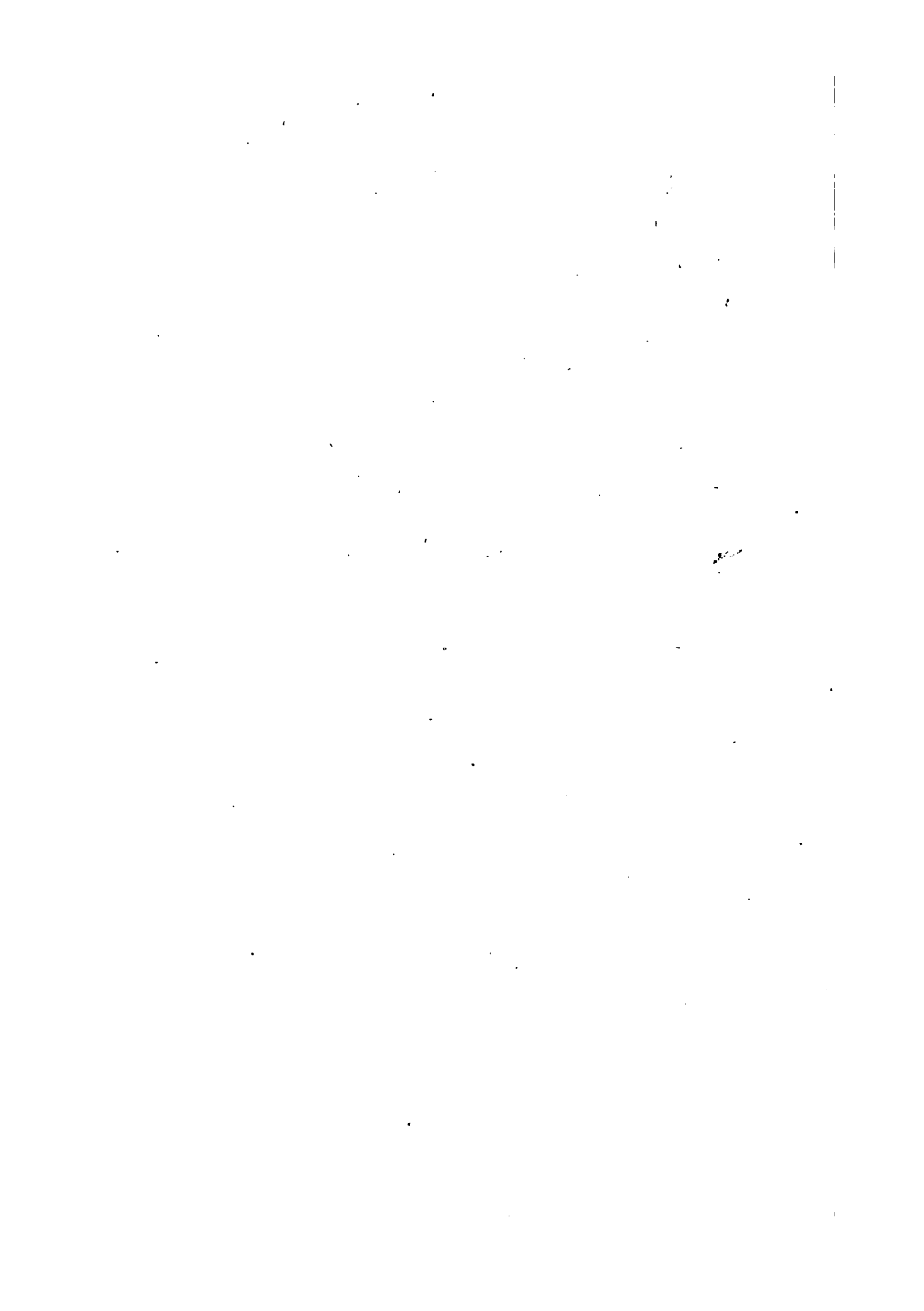


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THE SQUIRE'S LEGACY.

VOL. III.



THE SQUIRE'S LEGACY.

BY

MARY CECIL HAY,

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"OLD MYDDELTON'S MONEY,"

"VICTOR AND VANQUISHED,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE SQUIRE'S LEGACY.

CHAPTER I.

IN that well-known fable of the Egyptian slave's, where the wind and the sun bring their little domestic differences to bear upon an innocent pedestrian, and contest the power of robbing him of his outer garment, the circumstance of this outer garment being selected gives an unfairness to the whole transaction. The reader would be left with a far keener appreciation of justice if the little wager had been laid upon a hat, for then the chances would have been equalized. Then the smile of congratulation on the round sun-face when the unsuspecting traveller lifted his hat from his damp brow, would have had its counterpart in the boisterous buffo laughter of the nor'-easter when the beaver

went rolling and bumping along the road in advance of its owner, turning after every halt, and starting afresh, just at the moment when its hopeful pursuer was within an inch of grasping it.

This was something of Monsieur Philippe Sourdets thought as, that evening, he was delayed, on his road from Minton to Kingswood, by constant pursuits of this article of his attire—chases of a most lengthy and tantalising description. Certainly, these pursuits in themselves obliged a very irregular course of proceeding on Monsieur Sourdets part; but to any one who had deeply studied the phases of human intelligence, there would have been much that was suggestive in the fact that, even in pauses of the chase—even when Monsieur Sourdets head was covered—his step was still irregular. And, though at times his huge frame was braced spasmodically to a backward angle, his normal bearing was one in which the head and shoulders moved decidedly in advance. Beyond this, Monsieur Sourdets exhibited a strong inclination to hold converse with himself, on the smallest provocation, in a feeble, argumentative manner. Yet, though this con-

verse was of a nature to have irritated Monsieur Sourdets from a fellow-creature, it was received from himself in a spirit of thoughtful and friendly sympathy.

As Monsieur Sourdets's slouching step bore rather heavily upon him in the matter of weariness, he would now and then allow himself a few moments' halt against a gate or stile, or other available prop ; and at such times he would invariably appeal, on behalf of himself, to that other self with whom he shared convivial ideas, and of whom he had evidently a fair appreciation.

"It's a stupid night—a black, blustering, stupid night—confound it !"

The fact that the circumstance had occurred once or twice before, was perhaps the reason of Monsieur Sourdets's not being surprised when that unsteady head-gear of his was whipped off while he said these words to himself, standing beside a gate which broke the long road-side hedge of the larch meadows. But perhaps it may have been that deficiency of energy accounted for the absence of surprise.

"There's the river down there," he argued, as he climbed the gate with excessive caution,

"and this fool of a wind is beating straight towards it."

Naturally the drift of such a thought was to quicken his steps, and so Monsieur Sourdets, starting with a plunge, ran down the sloping meadow which lay between the turnpike road and the river. If he had had the help of daylight, he might possibly have rescued his flying hat, but for a sudden decadence of the power of equipoise, and a final plunge, which, though intended to regain it, resulted only in a total overthrow. Monsieur Philippe, rising to his feet in the darkness, and applying slow and tender friction to one damaged shoulder, came to the conclusion that only idiotic fields ever sloped towards rivers, and only winds accursed ever blew so hard.

Having decided thus, with evident satisfaction to himself, he became aware—for now and then, when the clouds were blown from the young moon's face, it was still light enough for him to see—that he had reached that frail wooden bridge which crossed the river below the Green Pits. And there, on his right, were the lights in the farm.

"I declare," said Monsieur Sourdets, with the liveliest surprise, "here I am."

This fact appeared unanswerable by that other self to whom Monsieur Philippe discoursed; and so a heavy and profound silence dwelt round him, while he paused with one unsteady foot upon the unsteady bridge, and looked away to the farm, with a slowly-dawning steadiness in his vindictive eyes.

"Ha!" he muttered then, the hard metallic anger of his voice giving it a sober ring which was startling after its late calm and ponderous intemperance, "he's up and about. I see lights burning, and—what's that? Music, I declare! Confound him! He takes it all easily, to be sure. Ah! He wants a stronger touch before he's humbled into shape—a sharper touch, too—and he shall have it."

This generous anticipation acted as a spur to Monsieur Sourdret, and he trod the swaying planks with an airy confidence which was as unexpected as it was short-lived.

"Let me see," he ruminated; then pausing, with one hand upon the rail, as he turned his head slowly in the darkness, his coarse and grizzled locks blown upright on his head, "What do they call this precious, sportive breeze which blows from every quarter at once? East

—north-east? I forget. Its touch isn't a caress, certainly; and, when a man's head's bare, and his limbs tired, he—*sacré!*—be quiet, you bully!"

This command being disregarded by the unruly air, Monsieur Sourdets was obliged to continue his courageous progress under difficulties; and, by this time, he had left the river behind him, and was winding gradually round the hillock behind which lay the Green Pits—keeping to the pathway only during those few occasional moments when chance led him into it. He had temporarily forgotten the vanished hat, the pursuit of which had originally lured him from the high-road.

"Music!" he muttered again, in a tone which modulated from discontent to ferocity. "I hear a note or two now and then, when this vile wind pauses. Well, never mind," he added, soothingly; "he'll try a different kind of music soon—a cowed and humble tune—*ça ira!* Confound it all! How the old tongue slips out to-night, forgotten as I thought it! Hateful! Yes, he'll tune another note soon. Ha! ha! And all this ugly English *sangfroid* of his, and of his old *avocat*—there they come again. Deuce

take the words!—a hideous language, which I never spoke from the time I was a schoolboy. Whew! This precious breeze will take me of its own accord to shelter against the walls of that rickety old farm, and leave me there a jelly. *Diable!* Who's to stand against it, even with all my strength and pluck? What a fool the man is to live in such a shed, when, in that mansion over there——”

Though perfected possibly in Monsieur Sourdets's brain, the sentiment, as public property, was left incomplete; for at that instant Philippe Sourdets's weighty form collapsed, and, without grace or dignity, slipped down the grassy slope, until impeded by a high and firm obstruction, which Monsieur Sourdets—sending out one hand upon a cautious journey of discovery—found to be a wall.

“It's a deuce of a night to be out on when a man's joints are tired,” he muttered, rising with deliberation, and drawing one hand experimentally across his head, as if he fancied that, during this overthrow, fate might either have replaced his missing head-gear, or removed his head, and so prevented its need. “I begin to think I'd better go down to the house—an

infernal spot, but a shelter of some sort—and see that young idiot again, before we strike the *coup de grâce*. He'll come to his senses when I tell him that, if he doesn't listen this time, his last chance is gone, and his ruin *un fait accompli*. I'll venture it. An encounter may be worth a good deal, especially here, where he'll feel the force of what I threaten, and, I should think, appreciate, by force of contrast, what I promise. His insolence never hurts me—pooh, a *bagatelle*! But—ah, I never thought of that!—he may be prowling about now, as he did on that other night when our plans were laid. It would be just like him. Ay, forty to one he is. I shall see, at any rate, and we can have a *rencontre* out here if he is—it's sheltered. All right; a few hours make no difference. I can spare them, with such a *coup in petto*—Bah! How the words of those scamps and beggars in the Bush are turning up to-night. No, I'll leave the house alone at present—I'd leave it alone for ever if I'd a less stake upon it. There"—Monsieur Sourdet was cautiously feeling his way now along the wall—"ought to be a gate here, if I'm on the side I think. But it's too deuced dark to be sure where a man is."

Perhaps it was owing as much to Monsieur Sourdets mental duskiness as to the rather natural duskiness of nature at that hour, that both the gates in the wall surrounding Scot's stackyard so long eluded his groping fingers. Many a muttered curse had passed his lips, before his heavy left hand at last fell upon the bar of a closed gate; and, wheeling round, he brought his right quickly into the same position, and grasped the bar, as if he found the support grateful after his lengthened search.

"Locked!" he muttered, presently, giving the gate a feeble shake. "The fool is careful of his grain, then. I like to see that. Well, well"—Monsieur Sourdets whispered this with a slow, unctuous smile, as he circumspectly mounted to the first bar of the gate, holding tightly to the top one with both hands, and his smile broadening a little in the darkness, when he felt the wood crack under his weight. "Well, well, it's safe for this night, whether I find him here or not; safe for to-night, unless the wind brings down the whole rotten concern. Gently, gently"—This soothing advice was proffered to himself, as he warily stepped from bar to bar in his ascent and descent—"Gently, gently, for

in this infernal blackness a *faux pas* would be unpleasant."

Having accomplished a safe passage, Monsieur Sourdet's next step was a mental effort to recall the position of either of the barns which the yard held; but the mental strength available to-night proved inadequate to the task, and so he continued his groping career, still discoursing with himself, in that disjointed but candid manner which was compounded of easy fraternal sympathy with his own woes, and dogged malice against the fancied woes of some one else, on whom he bestowed no distinctive name, but a catalogue of general epithets, less varied and original than contemptuous and menacing. But when at last Monsieur Sourdet found the door of one old barn, and, putting his fingers through a hole in it, and raising the wooden bolt, discovered that it yielded to his touch, his broken words, both of encouragement and menace, dwindled into a muttering of supreme satisfaction. He turned and bolted the creaking door behind him, and then, in the shelter, he paused a moment, searching in every pocket (vainly, and for the twentieth time that night) for a box of fusees which he had ex-

hausted long before he left the turnpike road.

"The old walls bend and rattle like a sail at sea, it seems to me," he said, giving up the search with an acceleration of moodiness, "but still they keep the infernal blast outside, and that's something. Now I've only to find my way to the loft, and I must be a fool if I can't make myself comfortable till morning, when I shall be on the spot to give that fellow his last chance. Well, considering all, it couldn't fall out better. Here I am ready—for, after all, it's a good pull from Wakeley's cottage down here; and I declare, if I'd remembered, in walking out from Minton, that I must pass so near the farm before reaching Kingswood, I might have planned to do exactly what I'm doing now through chance—just chance. Just through the wind blustering in this direction, and—ah, yes, I forgot that;" and Monsieur Sourdets raised his hand to his uncovered head, with a sudden recollection of that one freak of the wind which, important as he had felt it at the time, had glided from the slippery surface of his memory. "I forgot that—quite forgot it."

By the time the words had been drawn out sufficiently to suit the speaker's languid and

meditative mood, his hands, busy at their old groping task, had guided him to a ladder which rested against an open trap-door in the ceiling of the barn, and Monsieur Sourdét, his feet mounting cautiously close behind his hands, chuckled pleasantly as he ascended.

Just as his heavy, swarthy face appeared in the opening of the upper floor, a glimmer of moonlight, pale and fleeting, fell across it; but there were no eyes in that dark upper room to be startled by such a sight, and the faint ray melted into darkness once again.

"This," said Monsieur Philippe, as he stepped from the ladder, and threw himself at full length upon the corn; "this is comfort on such a night. This indeed is luxury on such a night, compared—compared——" the words were growing broken and indistinct, the tone lower and more husky—"with an existence at—the mercy of that *diable* of——"

The muttered imprecations grew here so weak and slow that fortunately half their venom was lost in their maudlin impotence; and that fickle comforter which flies the pillow of the brave and generous crept up and closed his heavy eyes, making the shelter into utter calm

for him, and deepening the darkness. He had thrown himself upon his back, with his linked hands beneath his head, and once or twice a pale, faint ray of light fell across his upturned face, so gently and so swiftly that it might have seemed, from the surrounding darkness, like the warning and awakening touch of a pitying hand. But, unwarned and undisturbed, he slept on ; and in one dark corner of the building, a large black cat, his only comrade there, stood back against the creaking wall, alert and wakeful, glaring from side to side, restless and intent, warned as its sleeping companion could not be. Then suddenly it started, and with its head raised, and its side against the wall, it crept round and round the loft. The heavy sleep, against whose approach Philippe Sourdhet had for hours fought as surlily as he had fought against the furious northeaster, had laid a firm, revengeful hold upon him now. So, bound in the fetters of his own intemperance, he lay, while the wind cried round the old building with a restless, rousing voice.

Motionless still, he lay wrapped in this heavy slumber ; when a light fell upon his sleeping face, which was no ray from the young moon. The great black cat, its eyes aflame in the

darkness, suddenly stopped its silent creeping round and round, and—darting across the sleeping man with a touch which was too light to awake him—disappeared.

One moment afterwards, Philippe Sourdét stirred in his sleep, and a muttered imprecation tottered from his lips. But his heavy eyelids were not lifted until his eyes opened in a sudden smart and terror, when the flames had glided up, and—from beyond his head, and feet, and hands—seemed to meet in a red canopy above him.

CHAPTER II.

ON many and many a Summer evening, as Anna Wakeley sat sewing in the window of her cottage on the slope, had she raised her eyes to let them rest yearningly upon the sunset glory in the western sky. But to-night, while the Winter sky flamed crimson in the west, hours after sunset time, she stood before her cottage window, with strained and feverish gaze, her fingers tightly locked, her face white as death, and touched to anguish every now and then, when the light sped upwards with a fiercer glare, or, on the strong wings of the wind, swept toward the timbered walls of the old farm, and the long thatched buildings on its western side.

For long had the neglected fire been dead in the cottage grate, yet Oliver sat beside it, with

a pipe in his mouth, holding his dirty newspaper to catch the light of a candle which flared beside him on the table; but his eyes, though even steadier than usual to-night, were never for one minute fixed steadily upon the columns. There was a new restlessness in their glance.

"Oliver!"

His wife's call was a perfect cry of anguish; but Oliver paused deliberately before he lowered the paper and looked across the kitchen, gathering a dead, unnatural sleepiness into his gaze.

"What is it ye're bothering about?" he asked, heavily. "Can't ye leave a man to read his paper after a 'ard day's work? Ye're staring yerself enough for 'alf a dozen on us. Ah! What d'ye start for?" he added, with an eager, expectant change of tone. "Is it the furriner ye see coming?"

Oliver had risen in the excitement of this hope, but one glance into his wife's face—without one from the window—showed him that there was no sign upon the slope of the man whom he had expected; and he dropped again, heavily and sulkily, into his seat.

"How the flames roar and rush!"—the words were a very whisper as they came from Anna's

lips, while her locked hands rose and fell before her in a measured, restless misery—"And the ground rises so steeply between the rick-yard and the river. Oh, Oliver, in the name of pity, go and help! Can any man see such danger and destruction, without offering the little aid he can? For it's little that even the strongest of us can do at such a time."

7 "You'd best shut that shutter," Wakeley muttered, refilling his pipe. "I've told ye before; and, if ye don't do it soon, I'll come and do it myself. A nice hour this is for decent women to be up and staring about 'em."

"I am going," said Anna, turning to face her husband, her look firm in all its agony and pallor. "If you can bear to stay here and see the wind swaying that flame straight to— Oh, go!" she broke off, pleadingly. "And go quickly, Oliver. The stacks are gone—nothing can save *them*; but life may be in danger, and we can all help there, perhaps."

"*I* go?" echoed Wakeley, with an attempt at scorn in his savage voice. "Not I! And what d'ye mean by taking that tone on? Ye say the stacks is gone—jest as if I cared. It isn't me—it's the furriner as wanted 'em

burned. He'll be glad o' this accident—eh?"

The last word was uttered so sharply, after a pause, that its own suspicious motive was laid bare at a glance.

"Yes, he will be glad," said Anna, quite quietly; but the fingers with which she was trying to close the window-shutter, shook so helplessly that she was obliged to give up the attempt, in spite of the strain she put upon herself.

And so the red light still glided in, and laid a flush of its own colour upon the woman's pallid face, and gave a flash of its own savagery to the man's sullen scowl.

But Oliver, watching suspiciously, saw one purpose strong in his wife's face; so he rose from his chair and threw off his coat with clumsy haste. "Ye're not going; and so I tell ye, oncet for all!" he said, moving about noisily while he spoke. "Ye'll stay at 'ome like a respectable woman, and the wife of a respectable man—so I tell ye, oncet for all. Why, of course," he added, with a crafty lowering of his rough tone, "we're a respectable couple enough, if folks only leave us alone. We're not fond o' prowling about at nights; and so let

them as is fond o' that sort o' thing, go and 'elp now. We don't know anything about what's goin' on at the Green Pits. Why should we? Come away now, and shut that shutter. D'ye hear?"

This was a usual conclusion to Oliver's addresses to his wife, and perhaps it was because its frequency had robbed it of all interrogatory properties that it generally, as now, won no reply. A pause followed his words, which was so marked and so emphatic that it seemed to him, in his concealed wrath, to be of untold length. Yet it was only one minute after the utterance of his rough words that, watching furtively from his position on the hearth, he saw his wife fall on her knees beside the window with a cry, and cover her eyes with her locked fingers.

"If *you* don't think it's bed-time, *I* do," muttered Oliver, stirring uneasily. "Come along, girl. What's that theer light at the Green Pits to do along of us? It's out o' the way o' 'arm to folks. Come along, d'ye 'ear? And jest put that shutter up, that a man's 'ouse may look respectable this time o' night."

"You can put the shutter up when you

choose," said Anna, speaking calmly, when she rose and turned her face from the glass to which it had been so near. "I am going."

"No, ye ain't," roared Wakeley, both face and voice betraying a keen and evident fear, though rough and authoritative as ever; "'less ye mean ye're going to bed."

"Even a woman," resumed Anna, quietly, though with intense trembling, "can help in the carrying of the water round that hill."

"No, she can't, and no, she won't," roared the man; "woman's dooty's to stay in-doors, and when she don't know it of 'erself, her 'usband must teach her. I'll have no gallivanting down there, d'ye 'ear? No more I'll have any sniv'ling up 'ere, and so I tell ye oncet for all. Remember, as we two are 'ere at 'ome all this night, and have been 'ere at 'ome since dark. Ye'll maybe have to tell that after, and it's well to be ready—women are sich fools sometimes, if they're took by surprise. We've bin in out of the wind, and I've bin reading you the paper, whiles ye sewed that theer shirt o' mine. I ain't fond o' being out o' nights, when theer's a decent fire, and supper, and bed at 'ome. That's the truth, as you'll maybe have to tell 'em some time."

He had laid his heavy hand upon his wife's shoulder, and as he spoke he tightened his strong fingers, with a grip which at any other time would have brought a cry from her lips; but now, without even a struggle, she moved from his grasp, as if her strength were really the greater of the two.

"If I am asked," she said, coldly and distinctly, "I shall tell them that you were out to-night so late that the fire must have broken out—though I had not seen it, having the shutters closed—before you came hurrying in from—the Green Pits."

"I—say," whispered Oliver, his hard lips drawn back from his teeth, as he lowered his savage face to his wife's, "if ye tell any lies like them, ye'll repent it—d'ye 'ear? Hullo!"

The exclamation followed the threat so rapidly that it was little wonder Anna's startled gaze rested on her husband's face so curiously for the first moments.

"It frightened you," she said then, her lips stiff with fear, though she spoke coldly. "I have been expecting it before. I knew that, as soon as anyone could reach Kingswood, they would ring the alarm bell. It is no use, of

course, but I knew some villager, in his fright, would do that, to hasten the engines from Minton. In this wind, the sound, loud as it is, scarcely travels beyond us. It—it needn't alarm you."

"What d'ye mean?" grumbled Wakeley, making a surly effort to regain such ease as this sudden summons had robbed him of. "It was yerself that was frightened. Come from that door."

Again he seized her roughly, pulling her back into the cottage, and holding her there, while her breath came in gasps through her teeth.

"Listen, Oliver," she said; then, with a quietness which, in an instant, roused his worst suspicions, and made him feel her to be crafty as himself. "If you and I keep away now, from such a scene as that, people will say—they are sure to say it—that we had a *motive* in keeping away. Everybody is there, and if we are not, we—shall be suspected."

"What d'ye mean?" inquired Wakeley, with an ugly scowl; but still he slackened his hold upon her arm.

"I mean that anyone who keeps away from

the Green Pits to-night will be suspected of——”

“Fool!” shouted Wakeley, pushing her from him. “You don’t know what ye’re talking about. Go wheer ye like; I’m not stopping ye. Of course all the women ull be there, so you’ll never be content to stop away. Then go. Am I ’olding ye? But ye’ll go without me; I’ve ’ad a ’ard day’s work, and I’m never one as goes after sights and crowds.”

“If the men miss you,” said Anna, quietly, as she drew back the bolt of the cottage door, “they’ll say, ‘Why did Wakeley stay away, when he might have helped, like all of us? He would see the glare plainly from his cottage, and he’d have come, if he’d known nothing about the fire before. He’d have come down here to find out what caused it—if he hadn’t known already.’”

Then she passed through the door, and closed it after her; but, before she had reached the foot of the hill, she heard her husband’s step behind her, slouching as usual, but so hurried that he reached her readily, in spite of her great haste.

“Look ’ere, Anna,” he said, with an attempt

at surly indifference, "I know nothing about why ye're poking yerself down there, or what ye're going to do; but it may be jest as well to tell ye, oncet for all, as your evidence couldn't do me no 'arm in any court of jestic in the world—d'ye see? If I'd done all the things as ye seem to think I should enjoy to do, ye couldn't get me into prison; I'd have ye remember that. Why, even"—with a hard, forced laugh Wakeley added this, as he slouched on at her side—"if I'd bin and set fire to those ricks myself, like sich an idjet as I should never be, *you* couldn't tell of it. A man's wife ain't allowed to tell any lies ag'in him, to get him into trouble, so—as women allus think they tell the truth—they ain't allowed to speak at all. Lawyers knows best what's fair and jest to a man; so that's law—d'ye see?"

"I see," said Anna, with intense quietness, while she hurried on, her hands clasped under her shawl, and her eyes fixed upon the distant glare which reddened the night sky.

"I don't believe ye're listening," grumbled Oliver, still keeping beside her, though with difficulty; "but I'll make ye presently, I can tell ye. Not as ye've less sense than other

women," he added, with a change of tone, as he looked askance into her white face—"indeed, ye've plenty when ye like to use it; so there's no sich need to din a simple fact in yer ears a 'underd times, before ye see the jostice of it. Go along, girl, if ye choose, and I'll come too; and we'll 'elp 'em if we can. I dursay some clumsiness of that dwarf's done it, but likely the engines ull save a good bit. Come along. It's a good law as leaves 'usband and wife so comfortable together that they can't say a word ag'in each other 'thout it's being made jest so little of, as all lies ought to be."

After this expression of conjugal appreciation, Oliver Wakeley relapsed into silence, and, though his wife was in reality painfully and keenly alive to his every movement, she had, to all appearance, lost all thought of him before they reached the people who stood in a double line round the rising ground between the Green Pits and the river; a crowd with mixed motives, and offering varied suggestions, yet all united in one present, active need—that of filling and passing those vessels, the contents of which, heavy though they might be, seemed so

terribly impotent in quelling the furious flame which rode on the wind above, strong and mighty in its defiance of such feeble efforts to stay its course.

Without uttering a word to anyone, Anna Wakeley took her place close to the river, and filled the pail she had carried from home, passing it on through the ready hands, as she took the next one which came up to her empty. One or two people had time to notice the quiet, ceaseless activity of the woman, and the one low, terrified glance she gave up at the blaze, as it swept onwards, and at last caught the farm in its hot embrace; but none knew what deep and wordless prayer the sad eyes lifted, high beyond that red flame in the sky.

Most quick and most untiring, among so many who were prompt and active, she seemed to have a strength to-night which was more than natural, yet did not seem like the strength of excitement which helped so many; because she was utterly and curiously quiet.

But, unconscious as she seemed of aught beyond her ceaseless and silent employment, no single word was uttered in her hearing which her mind did not grasp and hold; and, when

the fire-engine came dashing through the park from the stone bridge, and the line was broken in this new excitement, she carried the water past the gaps herself, and, by her silent example, drew the crowd presently to their steady work again.

"She's right," said one man, speaking quickly at his task ; "our help is wanted here as much as ever. They will play the engine on the house, of course."

"The west wall is falling."

"The roof is open to the sky."

"It's to be hoped they've saved what's in those rooms."

"Of course they'd try ; but then, you see, so much help was wanted here."

So, as the night went on, did the words pass to and fro—for, in the relief of having aid from Minton, the busy water-bearers could afford to talk a little more frequently—and Anna listened, still in silence, feeling each word sink into her memory, engraved there for her life.

"Pray God there will be no one hurt !"

"I wouldn't answer for that ; but the *lives* are all spared. Miss Windish is in the garden—

you can see her plain enough, every now and then in the glare. She's in the house again now, saving what she can. And the young Squire—it's plain enough to see him all the time—he's on the wall now, using the hose against the barn. Black and grimed as he is, I'd swear to his figure anywhere, even by such fiendish light as this."

"But I saw the young Squire pass to the house long ago, with a child in his arms."

"That was long ago, as you say. He's been at work ever since, working like half-a-dozen men. See him now!"

But, though Anna stood nearest of all to the speaker, her eyes dropped lower, instead of being lifted to that one figure, standing out dark and distinct against the lurid background.

"You mean the child he brought with him from Londou. I couldn't understand, Liath, how the young Squire found him. That reminds me—where's Liath now?"

"At the house. He's been throwing against the west wall—throwing like a giant, instead of the dwarf he is."

"And Elizabeth?"

"She's in the line here; higher up, close to the yard."

"Then who is it that's helping Miss Windish, carrying all the heaviest things, and running backwards and forwards so fast?"

"That's Miss Egerton."

"Miss Egerton!"

The exclamation came from more than one of the listeners, but still Anna, though her eyes softened, did not pause. Long ago she had recognised the slight, darkly-clad figure, working so swiftly and untiringly, yet always seeming near Miss Windish in her shrinking panic.

"Fancy Miss Egerton being here, and working like that; she might have sent a servant instead."

"That wouldn't be very like her," some one answered from the line—a young man who wore the Egerton livery—"She asked the women to come and help, just as she came herself; and the Colonel sent us. We've left the Dower House empty, except for the housekeeper; and I'm sure, if the Colonel isn't working like a regular soldier——"

The suddenness of the interruption attracted everyone's attention to Colonel Egerton him-

self, who came hurrying up in his shirt-sleeves.

"You may as well stop this useless labour now," he said, hardly raising his tones; though, after he had passed, there was no one who had missed the words. "The fire in the yard must spend itself, and we have the engine at the house. You have worked capitally throughout, but it would be useless to waste more time and strength; break up now, and, if any of you can give assistance at the house, I'm sure you will do so."

Colonel Egerton addressed no one in particular, as he passed along the line, but yet, almost unconsciously to himself, he gave a kind glance to Anna Wakeley when, in the trembling light, he caught sight of her white, anxious face.

"Where is Oliver? I have not seen him here."

The woman's eyes dropped swiftly, and her lips grew so tight that it seemed as if her few words could hardly pass them.

"I think, sir, that Oliver is at the Green Pits."

"Is he? That is well; he is strong, and owes a debt of gratitude to Mr. Monkton. He certainly should be helping."

The officer had passed on without waiting for any reply to his words, but afterwards he could recall the pallor of Anna's face and the quick heaving of her breast.

The Winter dawn was still two hours distant, when an awed, hushed whisper, flying among the scattered groups, told—even before the words were distinguishable—that amid the lurid horror of this night, brooded the grim, gaunt presence of death. Anna Wakeley left her work the instant the meaning of this whisper reached her, and, shrinking against the wall of the stack-yard, and, looking across the smouldering ruins with wide, glazed eyes, saw none of the forms around her, nor the lights darting here and there as the greater light failed. She saw only in imagination, with an awful vividness, that one spot of blackness which, while others lowered their tones to call it death, seemed to shriek out another name to her, in such shrill and piercing tones that, though both her hands were on her ears, she fancied cry, and fancied scene, drew her face into hard and rigid lines, and stiffened the lids above her fixed eyes.

Suddenly this forced tension of every nerve

was broken, and Anna sprang forward. Yet the startled surprise was only caused by the utterance of her own name by Liath, who, small and quiet, had come up to her, there in the shadow of the wall against which she stood in a strained attitude of intense and frightened watchfulness.

"I didn't hear you, Liath," she faltered, trying nervously to account for the start she had given; "I didn't know you were there."

"I dursay not, Mrs. Wakeley," returned Liath, in his slow, matter-of-fact way. "I've on'y bin lookin' round."

"You have been doing more than looking round to-night," said Anna, seizing, with an effort, on any words which might sound natural and easy, as she walked slowly on at Liath's side, over the scattered ashes.

"I s'pose you're going home now, Mrs. Wakeley?"

Anna knew that Liath was a man of very few and slow words, yet to-night even that curt speech seemed laden with meaning, and even with suspicion.

"Yes, I am going home," she said, hurrying in her assent. "But—but, Liath"—turning

wistfully to him in the gloom, and dropping her voice, even low as it had been—"where—where have you—where is it lying?"

"Dunna you go to see that, Mrs. Wakeley," said Liath, solemnly. "It's no sight fur them as ain't forced into seeing it."

"But—I must."

"In course," mused Liath, gravely, as he walked on, "in course if any other woman wur to ask it, it would be out of cur'osity, and I'd know it; but it's different in course for you, and as he lived at your cottage——"

"Not for that reason," put in Anna, in a tone quickened by real horror, "he never really lived with us. He used our cottage when he chose, but he was always a stranger, an utter stranger."

"You've o'erdone yourself to-night, Mrs. Wakeley," said Liath, with real sympathy in his hard, honest face. "Hadna you better go 'ome and see no other bad sights this night?"

But, save for a shiver which passed through the woman's shrinking form, there was no sign that she had heard this proposal. She kept close to the old man's side, until, leaving the rick-yard, and turning aside from the busy scene be-

fore the smouldering wall of the old farm, they stopped beside a low cart-shed, in which a group of people were gathered, barely distinguishable by the light of the lanterns which moved slowly to and fro, and rose and fell, in the gloom which Anna's searching eyes pierced so eagerly.

"It's theer," whispered Liath, making a stop. "I'm not goin' in ag'in, and you won't neether, if you take my advice, Mrs. Wakeley. Ha! theer's Oliver. I thought he wur gone—not as he'd be tired of his work, for it ain't much he's done; but, though I've seed 'im about 'ere and there, I missed 'im later. Shall I call 'im to ye, Mrs. Wakeley?"

"No," whispered Anna, eagerly, "don't call him—please. Let me go to him."

And so Liath stood, and let Anna pass on alone to the shed; but, if she had turned, and there had been light enough to see, she would have read a keen and shrewd suspicion on the old man's face—and even in his attitude—which, in her timidity, might have turned her aside from that charred, disfigured object upon which those who came to recognise it could only bear one glance in the lantern light.

"That theer's creepin' work for Wakeley," muttered Liath, standing still to watch the heavy figure of the poacher as it moved stealthily in the obscurer parts of the shed; "creepin' work—creepin' work; but then he's used to creepin', that's true."

As he spoke to himself, even more slowly than was his wont, his gaze grew more and more intent and shrewd, and it was evident that a new determination was forming itself in the old man's mind.

Half an hour afterwards, when, covered, at last, from scrutinising eyes and glimmering light, that blackened, crumbling *something* which was all that remained of Philippe Sourdets, had been carried away, Liath, coming from his distant work, entered the shed alone, and turned the light of his lantern suddenly and fully upon the burly figure of Oliver Wakeley, on his knees among the ashes which had drifted even here, or had fallen from that burden which had so lately been carried away.

"You, is it, Wakeley?" questioned Liath, just as if he had made the discovery only when he spoke. "Is yer wife gone home her lone, then?"

"She's able to take care of herself," muttered Wakeley, shuffling to his feet. "I'd dropped an old pocket-book, and was lookin' for it."

"Feelin' for it, ye mean," corrected Liath, dryly.

"Yes, feelin' for it—course I do," blurted Wakeley, who had never been accustomed to stand correction of any sort from such as Liath.

"And ye think ye dropped it 'ere, eh?" queried Liath, raising the lantern as Oliver rose, so that the light might still reach his face. "Then ye wur in 'ere afore, I suppose—come in to see the last of yer lodger, eh?"

"I saw him—yes," returned Wakeley; and Liath smiled to see the huge bully glance around him with fear of which a woman might have been ashamed—but then it was only momentary—"I saw him after they put him here, not afore."

"No?"

Liath uttered the monosyllable interrogatively, having an inexplicable conviction that some question important to Wakeley lay behind this speech—a conviction which was strengthened the next moment by Oliver's ungainly attempt at conciliation.

"Yes, it was a frightful sight, and I don't wonder you kep' away; but they say it was you as found the body first—all that was left of it. Wheer was it? I didn't 'ear."

"Didna ye?" inquired Liath, in his slowest tones, as he unflinchingly returned Oliver's unsteady gaze. "And ye want to know?"

"Course I do."

"In course ye do," assented Liath, in Oliver's pause. "Well?"

"Mr. Sourdet and me was so well bekown to each other," continued Wakeley, with an attempt at his usual bluster, "that course I feel interest in anything about him. I should think you'd understand that sort o' thing, 'thout explaining."

"Ay, I understand," replied Liath, grimly; "you was good friends, I know—all on us know. Well, come along: I'll show ye wheer I fust fund the drenched cinders of what used to be yer friend. Come along."

Judging by the scowl upon Wakeley's face, he would have liked to resent the rough command; but evidently a second thought stirred him, and he willingly and promptly followed Liath from the shed, his heavy,

slouching step never quite gaining upon the little old man who led him. They passed through the burnt and broken gateway, and entered the Green Pits; but half-way across the yard Liath stopped.

"Theer ain't much left o' the old barns now," he said, pointing straight before him, "but it was in that un, among the ashes theer, inside those tumblin' bits o' walls, as I fund 'im. Theer's some o' his tatters about theer now, I dursay, lyin' in the wet. You'd like anything as reminds yer of him, I dursay."

"Are you coming on?" inquired Wakeley, his rough and surly tone hiding the real anxiety which caused the question.

"I'm not comin' in jest now," replied Liath, very slowly; "not jest now. I'll see ye agin presently, and, if ye've fund any remember-me sort o' property belongin' to the breeved relics, I'll in course be glad to 'ear on it."

If Wakeley had desired an explanation of this somewhat curious remark, he would have failed to obtain it, for Liath had left him hastily, as if conscious of having wasted quite time enough in idle words.

"He's off to slave agin, as he's slaved all

night," thought Oliver, with a grin of contempt for the old man who could toil unnecessarily for others. "He's safe away now."

But, from the darkness near, with a grim satisfaction on his face, Liath had paused to watch Wakeley begin his search among the soaked and blackened refuse of the fire.

"I see."

These two words were all Liath thought necessary, as he turned away to make up, in harder work, for those lost minutes; but the tone in which he said them was replete with meaning.

CHAPTER III.

THE wintry sun shone ruthlessly next morning on the blackened opening in the roof of the Black Birches, and on the wall which, on the western side of the house, stood bare and gaunt upon the upper story. True it was but an attic room which was destroyed, but the old farm looked a dismal dwelling now; scarred and discoloured, the windows smoke-begrimed and broken here and there, while still the water-stains ran from every ledge, and the garden-beds had lost all form, and were trodden into a muddy plain.

It would have been a sad night's work, even if the master of the farm had been able at once to rebuild and beautify, and to replace the stock which he had lost ; but, his circumstances being such as they were, there lay a heavy cloud of hopelessness upon the house, which

deepened a hundredfold this outward disfigurement upon which the sun shone so mockingly this morning.

At Christmas, ready money had been so unobtainable that Scot had let his insurance lapse; and now, at one blow, was swept from him the greater part of his means, both for present and future existence, for himself and for those who were dependent on him.

“What would be done now?”

This was the thought which was perplexing Miss Windish so mournfully, as she looked out upon the trampled garden, where the glistening of the sunshine on the little pools of collected water really hurt her eyes, now that they were so strained and stiff from smoke and sleeplessness.

“What would be done now?”

“Please”—Miss Michal turned swiftly round at this meek summons from a childish voice—

“please, are you crying?”

“Crying!” she exclaimed, with a voice of most unnatural hilarity, as she advanced to the little bed where the child had risen eagerly from his pillow. “What should any person cry about?”

"I saw a tear," the little fellow said, raising his head to touch Miss Michal's cheek, in that slow, wistful way peculiar to him, and which told that even from babyhood he had been the little companion, or comforter, of a sorrowing heart.

"A tear!" echoed Miss Michal again, cheerfully; and then she paused, for her vocabulary of cheerful observations had not been widened by a long experience. "I—I don't know what could have put such a thought into your head, my dear."

Then she seated herself by the side of the bed, and, with a clever side movement, drew her hand experimentally across her eyes.

"After that sleep," she observed, pleased to find no watery trace—for her misery just now was too deep and real to be properly relieved by its usual vent—"you'll soon be well again, and running about."

"Am I ill, then?" asked the boy, gently linking his hands before him, as he always did when this sad, unchildlike earnestness fell upon him. "Shall I die—like father?"

"Die like father? Heaven forbid?"

Miss Michal uttered the words unthinkingly,

with a shudder, and, a moment afterwards, would of course have given much to be able to recall them. The child's eyes were fixed upon her, so wide, and awed, and wondering, that she hid her face on his, and kissed him, as, through all her life, she had never kissed a child before.

"I think," she said, presently, when she had retaken her seat beside the bed, and had ransacked her mind for what might be a pleasant and successful train of thought to obliterate the present one, "I never finished quite all about Jack and the Giants, did I?"

"Oh, I'm so glad!" cried Willy, unlinking his feverish little hands. "I was afraid there was no more giants. Oh, please to tell it! Oh, please."

So Miss Michal—stepping very slowly and warily, because this portion of Jack's adventures was composed as she went on, she being perfectly aware that the real narrative had been completed long ago—was leading an original and rather weakly giant into a dilemma over which her eyes grew very round, though there were various means of escape evident, when the opening of the door interrupted her.

"Which is the awfulest, please?" asked the

child, anxiously laying his hot little fingers upon Miss Michal's as she rose. "A giant, or—a fire?"

Whether it was the memory evoked by this question, or the pitiful earnestness of the pale little face, Miss Michal could not have told, but her only answer had been a few slow and quiet tears, when Doris Egerton came up to her.

"I don't think it matters a bit, Willy," she said, brightly, as she set down upon the bed a little breakfast tray which she had carried "what sort of a giant it is, so long as there is a Jack to kill him."

"But Jack's so little," mused the child, with that pitifulness so prompt in the nature of some children.

"But so brave, dear," Doris answered, her dreamy eyes bright with some thought not expressed by her words, "that the giants cannot do him any harm—they never will."

"Then he's fighting *now*!" questioned Willy, his eyes widening with surprise.

"Yes."

"What—please?"

"Yes," repeated Doris, less dreamily, "he is fighting now—and beating all the giants too."

"I'm so glad," breathed the child, with a happy sigh. "I wish he'd come."

"Who—Jack?"

The little fellow's laugh was good to hear, when Doris asked him this question with such bright, grave eyes.

"Oh, no! But he said he'd come soon. Didn't you know I meant Mr. Monkton?"

"How could I?" smiled Doris, with an involuntary kiss upon the questioning face. "Now come and eat your breakfast."

"I—please I don't want it."

"While you eat that egg," remarked Doris, coolly, as she opened it, and doubled together a very shaving of bread and butter, "I'm going to tell you about the little chickens; and, while you drink the coffee, you shall guess what Monarch has just brought in in his mouth. But, if you do nothing, why of course we shall have nothing to do, and we must both go away."

"Oh, no—please, no!" the boy cried, in a nervous tremor, while two spots of hectic colour burnt in his cheeks. "Only—he said he'd come."

"And has he ever," asked Doris, gently, as she held the cup to Willy's lips, "said he would do anything and not done it?"

"No."

"Then you know that he will come, dear, don't you? Miss Windish," the girl added, looking brightly up as she knelt beside the bed to help the child, "breakfast is only waiting for you. Elizabeth went to fetch Mr. Monkton before I came up, and papa is there. Everyone else is gone home."

"I suppose so," said Miss Michal, pathetically. She had herself witnessed the departure of most of their neighbours when the firemen left, but she had known that Colonel Egerton would be staunch to his old friend, and she had even guessed that Doris would be so. "It is a shame," she continued, rousing herself suddenly, "that you should have exerted yourself all night long for us, Miss Egerton. Since daybreak—when the child awoke so ill and feverish, and I came to him—I have stayed here and left everything to you. It was a shame to do so, and I'm very sorry."

"I am very glad. But I will wait with Willy now, if you will go down, please, Miss Windish," said Doris, for she fancied that the child, in his acute, nervous timidity, was not fit to be left.

"No, indeed," asserted Miss Michal, with mild

energy. "All this night you have taken no minute's rest, nor in any single matter spared yourself, or seemed even to think of yourself. I am not such a useless block as to let you work on now while I rest."

"I will rest presently," pleaded Doris, laying her gentle hand upon Miss Michal's. "Please go and see whether Elizabeth and I have managed respectably downstairs. If you will not, I shall fancy you are afraid of seeing the blunders I have made."

"Oh, here he is!"

The glad exclamation came from the child, after he had gently and obediently taken his breakfast under Doris's guidance, and Miss Michal turned to meet Scot with anxious scrutiny. But some moments had passed after the child's greeting before Doris rose to her feet, and lifted an unclouded face to Scot.

"You are laughing," he said, gravely, as he looked down upon her. "You may not think so, because you hear no sound, but I can see it in your eyes. I don't think it at all fair. My damaged appearance ought to strike you in a tragic, rather than a comic light. The man all tattered and torn ought to inspire melancholy rather than mirth, Miss Egerton."

"I do feel melancholy, for you have an enormous black on your face, Mr. Monkton."

His laugh was echoed by a bright little treble from the bed, but Doris's face was as demure as her words had been.

"I thought you'd come," whispered the child, presently, when Scot—standing at a respectful distance from the little snowy bed—began a solemn discourse with its occupant.

"Scot, my dear," whispered Miss Michal, "I wish we could get him to lie still for a little while. He is so feverish and excited that I began to think he ought to be left alone."

Scot, too, had seen this need, and so his discourse gradually drifted into a promise that, if Willy would lie quite still, Monarch should come up and sit with him. For this arrangement the child quietly whispered his thanks, and perhaps fancied that no one saw how hard it was to him to see Scot leave the room again, even though he went to fetch Monarch.

"Will—please, will Liath come up presently, do you think?" he inquired, as Doris and Miss Michal stood waiting for Scot's return:

"Very soon," promised Miss Windish, readily; "he cannot be long, for he only went to Comely Place."

“To Comely Place !”

Doris found herself repeating the words in a perplexity which, though she herself was quite unconscious of the fact, had a shadow of disappointment upon it. How hurriedly Liath must have been dispatched to Comely Place, while still his master continued his night's labour in the dawn ! And yet had not Scot himself been there last night ?

The clearness of the girl's thoughts were engulfed there, in a memory which seemed dim, and boundless, and unreal to her. It was only last night that she had danced light-heartedly at Osborne House, in a scene of brilliance and gaiety, where poverty, or sorrow, or death seemed a thing forgotten or unknown. It was only last night that Bernard Levey had asked her to be his wife. It was only last night that, across the glitter and gaiety, fell this lurid glare of fire around one solitary figure which had had no share in the festivity. And between that far-back memory of last night and this moment, there lay a time when thought had been swallowed up in action, and she had felt that even she too had, for a few hours, known fearless, unwearying, self-forgetting labour, such as his.

Thinking this, Doris looked a little more intently and anxiously now into Scot's face when he re-entered the room, and she saw—beyond the quiet bravery natural to it, and the smile for the child who rose so eagerly to meet him—the many nameless traces of his cool, undaunted struggle with fate. Was the simple, brave, unselfish life to be “ploughed by moments” to the end? If so——

“Now, Miss Egerton, shall we go and taste your coffee? As I hear you made it, I am of course sceptical as to its merits.”

The cool tone broke the heavy thought, and left Doris—as Scot's words generally did—in utter perplexity as to whether she ought to judge him by his words and his kind, frank glance, or by that fleeting look upon his face which told how hard it was, at times, to hope, and how vain to resolve.

“The coffee will be delicious,” observed Doris, with a parting nod to the child.

It was easier now to answer Scot in his own tone. He looked different since his return to the room, and she could not have told him now that he had an enormous black on his face; yet he still wore the grey suit he had burned and

blackened, and he had evidently no idea that his work was over. While noticing this, she passed him at the door, in her plain dark dress ; and just then he too noticed, in simple wonder, some change in her.

Recalling the glimpses he had caught of her through the busy night hours—while she ran so swiftly at her tasks, and worked so thoroughly and deftly—he wondered for a moment how it would have been if he had gone to Bernard Levey's ball, and Doris, fresh and beautiful in lily whiteness, had laid her hand within his arm just once, and let him lead her where he would.

"Now, honestly, Mr. Monkton, confess that the coffee is not so bad as you fancied it would be."

"It is worse."

"Is it really?" she asked, turning to him with raised eyebrows—such pretty, delicate eyebrows—as she sat on his right hand.

"It is indeed ; for I fancied it would be a decoction to which nectar would be a mere joke, and I find it—coffee."

"But not a despicable sort of coffee?"

"I have tasted worse," remarked Scot, coolly meeting her eyes ; "and I fear I may live to

taste worse again. Did you boil sugar in it?"

"You manufactured this extraordinary fluid, did you, little lady?" put in Colonel Egerton, enjoying the laugh against his daughter. "Well, I am not so much surprised at that—for I'm pretty well used to see you make mistakes—but the fact of your having courage to own to it does rather surprise me."

"It is delicious coffee," interposed Miss Michal, pathetically; "but I hope it won't make Scot grumble at Elizabeth's in future."

"Of course it will," said Scot, while Colonel Egerton laughed at the impossible notion of his indulging in that petty practice. "Had not we better have a fire every night, Miss Egerton, to bring you over to make it pleasant to imbibe the necessary cup? Though we all have to drink it, we cannot all make it pleasant."

Never guessing the earnestness which shone in her eyes, Doris gravely shook her head. "The benefit would be immense, of course; but—the price too high."

Thus they tried to begin the meal cheerfully and even merrily, but it was too difficult a task, while that night of horror lay so close behind

them, and its consequences stretched so cruelly into the young man's future. Colonel Egerton could shrewdly guess in what state this fire must leave Scot, and his kind heart was busy in devising impossible means of helping anyone so proud and sensitive. Gradually the conversation drifted into the event which each had tried to ignore; and so, in spite of all, it was with a feeling of relief that they rose from the table at last—Miss Michal insisting, with excessive mournfulness, that Doris ought to go to bed at once. "It's dreadful for you never to have been in bed at all," she added, "and after a dance, too."

"I don't feel as if I had missed a minute of sleep," smiled Doris; "but I think everything is carried back now, and put as it was before we had the alarm. So"—with a wistful glance at her father—"I can go."

"I am ready, dear," said Colonel Egerton, covering his damaged apparel with an overcoat; "but, unfortunately, Miss Windish, you will see me back presently. I'm too thoroughly an old soldier not to revisit the battlefield."

"Mr. Monkton," said Doris, softly, as, with her hat in her hand, she came to say good-bye to

him at the window where he stood, "was it true—what they whispered in the night—about Monsieur Sourdets?"

"Quite true, Miss Egerton," replied Scot, looking gravely out upon his defaced garden.

"And he was dead when they first found him?"

"Quite dead."

"He must have been in your stack-yard, then. But how was it that, if he had managed an ingress, he could not escape in time?"

"He was in one of the barns asleep—there can be no doubt of that," Scot said, still very quietly, and avoiding any of the ghastly particulars.

"How strange! Can you guess why?"

"I have not tried—yet."

"Then I suppose," said Doris, very thoughtfully, "that the fire was caused by some accident of his. Do you think he dropped a lighted match?"

"I think he fell from above, because some fragments of the upper flooring lay beneath him when he was found. And we know that the fire broke out from *below*—and at the stacks beyond. I know very little at present, Miss

Egerton, and I do not like to see your eyes saddened by these thoughts. Tell me, is Kenneth Bradford's drama in rehearsal yet?"

"Not yet."

"But we shall soon have our long-expected pleasure of hearing it?"

"Yes."

She answered brightly, but Scot noticed that this night had taken away much of her joyousness; and then he suddenly felt, with intense relief, that the change in her was accounted for by her dress. The dark serge was unrelieved by collar or cuffs—she having changed her ball dress in such haste—and her hair, though still showing how exquisitely it had been dressed last night, had been loosened when she had taken the flowers out; and, when afterwards the stray locks fell, they had been fastened back more with a view to comfort than elegance.

"Yes," mused Scot, "that is what alters her. I don't like it."

And yet no woman's dress which he had ever seen, was to dwell in his memory as this one did.

"Kenneth's anxiety now is growing very sad to see," Doris said, presently, in a grave tone;

"but—but I suppose it naturally would, Mr. Monkton?" she interrogated, wistfully.

"Naturally he will be anxious, until he knows his own strength. When the public has shown him that, he will have no further fear or doubt."

"He *has* the strength," mused Doris, softly.

Colonel Egerton had finished his parting words with Miss Windish now; and, while he joined Scot to entreat him to spend the evening with them at the Dower House, Doris put on her hat. Once or twice she tried to second her father's request; but only her eyes obeyed the wish, her lips refusing to urge this upon Scot, now that he must feel himself poor and defenceless, because she understood the acute sensitive nature, half hidden by his frankness.

"But there is no shadow of doubt about your ultimate good fortune," Colonel Egerton was saying, when Doris turned again from shaking hands with Miss Windish. "No one knew the truth better than Dryden when he said, 'He that courts Fortune boldly makes her kind.' You've courted Fortune as boldly as any man could; and, in her despair at being unable to provoke you, she will turn her wrath to kindness."

"A very knowing fellow was Dryden," returned Scot, tranquilly; "he had me in his mind also when he wrote, 'His corn and cattle were his only care.' Good-bye is it, Miss Egerton? Good-bye then, and with all my heart I thank you for the help—for all you have done for us since you came."

"Don't you think, papa," whispered Doris, as they walked slowly up the Larch Walk, while the feeble Winter sunshine threw across their path the shadows of the tall, bare trees, "that this must be the greatest loss Mr. Monkton can have? And when the worst comes, it gets bright and different, doesn't it?"

"Impossible to say, dear, and hard even to guess, because those who are down low are so easily pushed over. But, at any rate, one fact is certain; he can say, as Byron did to Tom Moore, 'Whatever sky's above me, I've a heart for every fate.'"

It was a pretty picture which met Scot's eyes when he went into Willy's room. The child sat up between his snowy curtains, gravely talking to Monarch, who, sitting upright beside the bed, rested his nose upon the coverlet, and, looking intelligently into the child's face, joined

mutely in the conversation, while he graciously received his gentle caresses. But Scot, after his first glance and smile, paused beside the window, and, as Liath came up from the wooden bridge—which had been saved from the fire by the hill which rose between the Green Pits and the river—he saw his master standing there very still and thoughtful, his face turned towards the Dower House.

It was only when Liath's step crossed the long, bare chamber that Scot turned—turned, so the old man fancied, with a start.

“Well?”

“Well, sir,” said Liath, with a succession of lively nods towards the little bed, “Mr. and Miss Chamberlain are purty well.”

“Was that the only message?”

“It wur all, sir.”

“You did not see Miss Chamberlain?”

“No, sir. You didna tell me.”

“Have you had any breakfast, Liath?”

“All I want, sir; I'm off to the Green Pits now.”

“I hope,” said Scot, “that you don't leave your meals because of that companion forced upon you, Liath?”

"Not I, sir," responded Liath, with suspicious haste. "He's not bad; he's quite good in some things—'specially eatin'."

"It is less likely than ever now," said Scot, with no inclination to smile, "that I can pay him off myself."

"Oh, as to that, I pay him off myself, sir, every hour of the day," retorted Liath, briskly. "It's a little return for his kindness in visitin' us 'thout a invite."

"But—" Liath came a little nearer now, and turned his back upon the child, so cutting off most suddenly the succession of nods and smiles—"but it isna 'bout 'im as I'm waitin' to see ye now, master. It's somethin' I fund—last night. It's best you should see it, sir. I dunna think it's anythin' as matters to me; so 'ere 'tis."

His mind being relieved so far, Liath looked back over his shoulder, and nodded three times rapidly.

"Where did you find this?" asked Scot, looking down, without any curiosity, on the box which his servant had given him—a small fire-proof case, about an inch deep, of the length and width of an ordinary envelope, and fast

closed, though bearing no sign of a lock.

"I fund it wheer I fund the Frenchman, sir."

"Oh!"

"And—" Liath's tone was stirred here by evident self-gratulation, but Scot did not notice it—"I was on'y jest in time. So you'd a-said, sir, if you'd seen Oliver Wakeley gropin' and gruvellin' after it, a bit later on."

"Why?"

"He best knows, sir. I didna ask 'im."

"I see."

It was not Wakeley's motive which Scot meant. What he saw was the fact that he possibly held now in his hands the papers which Sourdet had valued at ten thousand pounds. He knew—he had always known—that they were utterly valueless; but could he not judge for himself now?"

"It fastens with a spring, of course," he said, his deft brown fingers searching for the secret so successfully that in a few moments the little box sprang open with a click—Liath had left his master then, and was holding a placid conversation, beside the bed, equally with the child and the deerhound—and he saw that the box contained only one packet of papers, tied

together with red tape. These papers bore the mark of age, but on an outer label was written, clearly and boldly, Scot's own name, as it used to stand—

Scot Monkton, Esquire, of Kingswood.

A crowd of memories glided before Scot as he read it. So familiar was it that his thoughts came back from his old home with a shock, when he suddenly recollected that this could not be *his* name, but the name of that Scot Monkton for whose heir the old home had been given up.

CHAPTER IV.

A SOMBRE room, with two narrow windows looking straight upon other narrow windows opposite, and down upon one of those sleeping streets which intersect that restless region where the world's work is done, as the nights intersect our working days, and yet hold still their own cares—and their own great problems, too—in their quietness and solitude. A room whose meagre furniture frowned in a heavy gloom which could be scattered by no indefatigable sunbeam, because that sunbeam must be weak and tired by the time it had found its way through these dim windows, from the far-off glory of its birth-place.

And yet there, below one window, on a long sheet of manuscript, and on a busy, thin young hand, there fell a sunbeam even now—a won-

dering, questioning little ray, which timidly shunned the grim, dark furniture against the wall, and for just one moment had shyly touched the young man's brow with its own sweet country kiss.

It was a quiet room, where the brain could work its will without interruption, but a room to strike a chill to the heart of one who had just left a country home, where the silence was upon the fresh, pure air without, and the solitude rich with scents and memories.

This was why a shudder passed through Mr. Bradford's upright, wiry frame as he stood at the door of this room, in the early morning, and looked in upon his son.

"Hem!"

In itself a vague and rather insignificant monosyllable; but, as Mr. Bradford uttered it, bearing a whole volume of meaning to Kenneth, and, though he had been so far away in his world of dreams, it brought him swiftly back to his father.

"When did I return, eh?" echoed the old lawyer, looking round with a frown upon the books and scattered papers, as he answered Kenneth's greeting. "Why, this very hour;

and I'm off again this very hour too. Are you going to the office?"

"Yes, father; of course I shall be there by eleven, as usual."

"As usual!" ejaculated Mr. Bradford, again echoing his son's words, and doing his best (though failing) to hold fast that frown which melted under Kenneth's gaze, and left the old man's glance so loving and so proud. "'As usual' means that you hang your hat there, and leave your head somewhere else. A fine anomaly—a lawyer without brains; a man without muscle too, if you don't take care; a limber nonentity, who melts under his duty, as a snail does under salt. You are looking a bright specimen of manhood now. Put away those papers, and walk out to see Doctor Boyd. Never mind the office to-day."

"And tell Doctor Boyd," said Kenneth, laughing, "to do what he likes with me, only give me no medicine, and not diet me."

"If you follow your father's example in everything else," rejoined Mr. Bradford, determined not to smile, "you may follow it in that—not otherwise. Now put up this rubbish; surely you've no more to do to it, now you've

found some idiot to accept it for the stage."

"That's why I'm working at it now," said Kenneth, with a laugh which failed to hide his intense excitement. "Before it is put in rehearsal, I wish to finish it more carefully. If it fail, it shall not be for want of care. I, so new and young a writer, cannot expect people to listen to careless work. I would not offer that insult to the public, father."

"Pooh! D'ye think the public care an atom how you finish your work, so that it finishes for *them* while they can keep their eyes open? They'd rather have the sparkle of wealth than wit; and they think far more of pose than poesy. Another thing I'll wager, lad, the very bits you think the finest will be slurred over—sensibly—by your actors, and fall dead into empty boxes."

"What a picture of failure!" laughed Kenneth, "Surely you cannot know who are to act in my drama."

"Oh, I've heard," put in the old man, hastily, "male and female—all fixed stars and rolling planets. It's folly, lad, and my only hope is that you will soon see this fact for yourself. Can you even now, infatuated as you are, really

value the only return you can win for all this mental struggle? What will it be? There will come a night when excitement and expectation—and ambition, if you like—will have reached their climax, and those people to whom you have given tickets to see your play, or who have grown excited over it just because it is something new, or whom by chance you may have amused, may burst out into a lightning flash of approval and flattery; and those very people, calming down, will see only faults and blemishes when the flash has passed, and will coldly and sensibly hold you up to ridicule as a good mark for others to fling stones at, or will more surely damn with their own faint praise. What will they care that you've thrown into this work the very essence of your life, and stolen from your existence all those hours of rest without which no man can keep his youth and strength? Think again. Is it worth while, Ken?"

"Yes, it is worth while," Kenneth answered, gently. "What is it *not* worth, to succeed in the very highest walk of art?"

"The higher the walk the greater the fall. Begin a gradual descent, my boy, while you

have time. Hard am I?" he questioned, his own voice shaking a little as he saw the flush in his son's earnest face. "If I had been *always* hard, I should have shown myself a wiser man. Do you think it gives me pleasure to see you growing old before me—you, the last of—Put up those pens and papers," he broke off, petulantly. "It's as well to be a mummy at once as to have no trace of boyhood."

"I have had one of the happiest boyhoods any man ever looked back upon," said Kenneth, lovingly, as he laid his hand for a moment on his father's. "Always remember that, please, father, and how I owed that happiness to you."

"I can only spare ten minutes more," observed Mr. Bradford, as he very coolly—to all seeming—drew out his watch and looked at it; "you needn't go to the office to-day at all. Reynolds won't expect you, I daresay—indeed, if the truth were told, he *never* expects you. Go to Gordon Square and drive with Joan, for she is often lonely in her drives. Remember that you've too much energy of thought to stand energy of action too. Well," he added, with a change of tone which he fancied was imperceptible, as his well-drilled sympathy rose

again to harass him, "when is this intoxicating drama—you ought to cut off the last letter—to be acted?"

"In April, father."

"Leave off the polishing at once, then. It only thins the work, and rubs off all its vigour."

"Not," said Kenneth, thoughtfully, "if the work is strong, and to live."

"Bah! Any baby can say that, but it needs a giant for such work. And you are labouring now to fit characters to your actors and actresses, eh?"

"No—no, indeed," replied Kenneth, quickly. "I am trying to leave, in my work, characters that shall live, and in whom the actors shall lose their own identity. They may not be such, I know; but 'who aims at the sky shoots higher far than he who means a tree.'"

"I see," rejoined Mr. Bradford, curtly. "You have a hero who tears furiously from side to side of the stage, while anyone with half an eye can see how he keeps his stage instructions in sight, and—never forgets his audience."

"No," the young man answered, his eyes brightening with his subject, "my hero is never degraded to fury."

"A tame looby, then?"

"No, he is wakened to wrath, of course. I cannot pretend to heroic inspiration, father, but the aim I seek, is to bring together characters well opposed, striking against each other artistically—do you see?"

"Of course I don't. What is there to see?"

"To make my dialogue bright as well as vigorous," continued the young man, thoughtfully, "and, with one strong interest of human passion, to excite sympathy by the intensity both of human strength and weakness—do you understand?"

"No," again snapped the old lawyer. "Why didn't you purloin a plot of some other fellow's, and save all this trouble? It's the right thing to do, and always was. Corneille and Racine borrowed wholesale, and never troubled about repaying either; and as for Shakespeare—yet I daresay your highest ambition is to hear yourself dubbed a young Shakespeare."

"That," said Kenneth, "could only be an insult to the great dramatic poet who stands alone."

"It isn't genius that is necessary. It's advertising."

"I think differently of the English public, father.

"Do ye, lad? Well, may yours be the right thought after all, as you throw yourself on its mercy! Now I must be off to Kingswood; young Monkton has at last come to his senses about his property. Bless the lad, you look as surprised as if I said he had grown dramatic. Isn't it time he threw off his temporary insanity, before a pauper coroner fixes it on him for eternity?"

"Father," smiled Kenneth, "you roar like any sucking dove. Does Mr. Monkton say he will return to Kingswood?"

"Not quite, but he needs help, and for him to own that, is the first step—the only one which counts, according to proverbial wisdom."

"I hope he is not in any trouble," said Kenneth, his voice stirred by real sympathy.

"He's had a Writ served, I expect," returned the lawyer testily; "and, as he hasn't had a very wide experience in such matters, I'll go over and see about it. What message for Doris?"

"How I should like to come!" cried Kenneth, his thin face growing almost beautiful in the happiness of his pure poet-love. "No, I dare not s are the time now," he said, firmly, when

his father urged him. "It is a strong temptation—the very strongest temptation—but I really dare not. I don't know what message to send her," he added, with a smile; "I cannot send my love, because she has it, and I wrote to her this morning."

"This morning!" echoed Mr. Bradford, his keen eyes saddening. "Before daylight, I suppose?"

"Yes," the young man answered quietly. "I have not slept much lately, and I am better up. Who was it had a head which beat upon its pillow with a thousand schemes? Mine are not schemes exactly; but—oh, father, I see such grand dramatic situations in the night; and—and even if I *do* sleep, I wake so soon, with a rush in my ears of——"

"Of applause, I suppose," put in Mr. Bradford, turning away a little, to avoid his son's eyes.

"No—it is not that—I think. Sometimes I think it is, and then I find that it is music; and then I can fancy cries; and then shrieks upon my own name; and then Doris's sobs; and then—my own laughter, I think; and sometimes what I hear sounds like a long

'Hush,' whispered loudly by a thousand voices. I—I never know what it is."

"*I* know what it is, though," said the old man, hardly conscious how the hand trembled which he laid on his son's shoulder; "it's indigestion."

"I'll bid Doris send for him," he mused to himself, when he walked away, too deep in thought just then for words; "a good holiday at the Dower House will set him all right."

Though he had the morning papers with him in the railway-carriage, Mr. Bradford let them lie upon the seat opposite him, untouched, till he left the train at Minton; when he suddenly remembered them, and studied their columns intently through the drive to the Black Birches.

Half an hour after that, Scot Monkton, coming in from his devastated stack-yard, found the old man slowly pacing the trampled garden ground, muttering to himself, with a heavy frown upon his brow. Yet, when Scot came up behind him, and linked an arm in his, with a laugh of real pleasure at seeing his old friend, Mr. Bradford only inquired, with the greatest composure, whether Mr. Monkton would kindly inform him "what was the next beatitude about to descend upon this privileged abode."

"It was not the fire which made me ask you for your aid, Mr. Bradford," said Scot, following his eyes up the blackened walls to the roofless chamber. "The fire occurred only the night before last. It was about that debt of Wessel's that I begged your help. He has put a man in possession."

"Of this airy abode? How's his rheumatism?"

"We have some home-nooks even yet," laughed Scot. "It is not quite so bad as it looks from here. Come in and see."

"Not yet—not while the place holds a myrmidon of the French scamp's. Tell me all about it—out here."

There had been a keen frost in the night, and the ground was dry and hard under their feet as they walked to and fro, the young man telling of his journey to town, its cause and consequence, and the fire which so soon followed; and the old man, listening with great intentness, suppressing, almost immediately, those impatient ejaculations which rose so freely and naturally to his lips.

This forced silence was most evident of all, through Scot's narrative of his interview with Mr. Albert Mostyn, and it was a relief to hear it

broken even by that contemptuous groan with which Mr. Bradford received the intelligence that the "waif" Scot had picked up on the journey was now under his care at the Black Birches, and that really Scot's only regret respecting this fact was that the child had no one else to care for him.

"It is a pity," murmured the old lawyer, with supreme irony; "he might have been fortunate enough to fall to some one just a shade poorer, and less used to being tied to fretful infants. He was unlucky to tack himself to you, accustomed all your life to nurseries, and milk diet, and patience, and—poverty. *Dear child*, he should have done better for himself, and held fast to the coat of some young fellow who knows *nothing* about children—or sheriff's officers. Bah!"

After which little ebullition Mr. Bradford grew quiet again, and listened through Scot's account of the finding of Monsieur Sourdets's body, and the papers which he must have carried, and which Scot had put aside for the lawyer to read.

"Worthless rubbish!" remarked Mr. Bradford, curtly. "Now I'm ready to go in."

"Bless me !" he explained, as he passed through the hall. "Have you a battering ram at work upon the place?"

"It's the bailiff," laughed Scot. "He is beating on the door of the dining-room, where he usually elects to sit. Liath has locked him in. He always does when he can—and he generally can, for he is quick and deft and small, and the man is slow and sleepy. Even in the kitchen—where I suppose he thinks he may be safe with Elizabeth—Liath manages it sometimes."

"Cannot the man take the keys away?"

"No ; Liath keeps every key in his pocket, and only leaves one out of his possession, when it is in the outer keyhole of a room inside which the man is temporarily confined. Shall I let him out now?"

"Wait a minute, and we will do it more effectually. In the meantime, let us in."

Scot drew a long breath of relief when the officer had been dismissed, and very earnestly thanked Mr. Bradford for the loan.

"It is better, I think," observed the old man, coolly, while his thoughts still evidently hover-

ed about the abode and profession of Mr. Albert Mostyn, "to deal with respectable men when you can; and I believe T. & C. Bradford to be thoroughly respectable practitioners. Now let us see that French sneak's papers."

The papers were indeed—as far even as the shrewd eyes of the old solicitor could see—worthless rubbish, as he had said. There were four old letters, signed "R. Scot," folded without envelopes, and addressed to Mrs. Scot, at Rome; there was a pocket-book containing a rough diary, in which names and places were distinguished only by initials, and a photograph of the late Scot Monkton. But no clue could these papers give to a living heir, and no fresh light could they throw upon the story which the shrewd old man of the law had before traced to an abrupt and apparently impassable barrier.

Mr. Bradford put each article back into the case, after he had slowly examined it, and then took off his glasses, still more slowly, and rose.

"I shall take the box," he said then, coolly. "There will be no need to produce it at the inquest. It was picked up after the body had been removed."

"The inquest is over," observed Scot, sur-

prised, "and I produced those letters; I never thought of suppressing them—never for an instant. True, they had been, for nearly a year, a matter only between you and myself and Monsieur Sourdets; but still it seemed a matter for the jury then, so far as they might understand them."

"The inquest over, is it?" muttered Mr. Bradford, a tone of keen mortification betraying itself against his will. "What evidence was there?"

"Very little," returned Scot, with a visible horror of the subject. "Oliver Wakeley identified the body. He had last seen Sourdets four weeks before—of course that would be before Wakeley's detention—and had been for two days expecting him from London. It was Sutton's groom in Minton who had last seen him alive and well; he met him walking out here, and bade him good night. He said it wasn't quite dark then, and he noticed Sourdets was not sober. Everybody said that he must have taken shelter at the Green Pits, as a hat, with his name in it, was found next day under a hedge on the other side the river, and the idea was that he had turned to seek it, and had

fallen asleep before the fire broke out—fallen asleep in the loft, evidently, for some fragments of the upper flooring lay under him. The coroner said he did not propose to call any medical testimony in the case (unless the jury especially desired it) as the body was so much disfigured, and he considered there was sufficient evidence to show that death had resulted from the fire. The jury hardly deliberated at all; they at once returned a verdict of accidental death.”

Mr. Bradford had stood watching the young man's face, simply wondering, unconsciously to himself, how Scot Monkton could for one moment help feeling this accident an intense personal relief to himself, beyond the advantage of ridding the world of an idle, dishonest impostor.

“He *must* feel it so,” thought Mr. Bradford, decisively; “there can be no two thoughts on the matter.”

Fortunately just at this minute Miss Windish came into the room—Willy following like her shadow—and the old lawyer's eyes and thoughts were turned. Perhaps, of all the surprises which this day had given him, the greatest of all was

now come. That Miss Windish should appear with the little waif's hand in hers, and a smile—faint certainly, and a little plaintive, but a smile nevertheless—upon her small features, was odd enough to one who knew that she had invariably found life in every aspect full of woe, and the bestowal of smiles upon her fellow-creatures a matter of severe self-denial; but to see this child cling to Scot Monkton, and to see Scot's reception of him, was the oddest thing of all.

"Well," he observed, grimly, when he and Scot were left alone again, "now that you are literally forced into it, you are going to behave like a sane man at last."

"As nearly as I can."

"How soon may I dine with you at Kingswood?"

"You have to-day helped me out of my greatest difficulty, Mr. Bradford; and, as you say I need not repay the money until I choose, I think I shall get on now pretty well. If I work harder, and the Spring wheat can be——"

"Do I understand you aright?" questioned the old lawyer, with cutting deliberation. "Are

you going to struggle on in this ruined——”

“Hold a little harder, please; remember that every Englishman’s house is his castle.”

“Are you,” continued Mr. Bradford, uttering the words in wrathful haste, “going to work your fingers to the bone, and let your hair turn grey, in the hope of any return on *this* impoverished land, which old miser Harris only left you because he knew he couldn’t sell it?”

“I think I shall make it pay me back in time, with a fine interest too—perhaps such an interest as would satisfy even my friend in Duke Street.”

“In time!” echoed the old man, with supreme contempt. “No, not if you ply the plough and harrow till doomsday. The only chance you ever had has been taken from you. What have you to make another start upon?”

“What have I?” repeated Scot, tranquilly. “Do you mean in the way of money or muscle?”

“Money, of course.”

“Oh, in the way of money,” he said, pleasantly meeting the old man’s scrutinizing gaze, “I have simply nothing. There’s our summons to luncheon.”

Mr. Bradford’s astonishment at the beginning

of the meal—when he saw the little waif demurely seated beside Scot at the table, as if he had a right there—was nothing compared with his astonishment at his own conduct afterwards, when he found himself making grave and solemn remarks to this little lad, who was such a small and living contradiction, whose tones were so babyish and his grave and watchful politeness so unchildlike; whose eyes were so pleading and so wistful, yet who asked for nothing, and made no voluntary reminder of his small and frail existence; who inquired so gravely into the meaning of Scot's merry remarks, as if unused to merriment, and yet was so quick to appreciate every word or glance of kindness.

“A nice charge for him to have undertaken,” mused the old lawyer, his vexed thoughts reverting to Scot even while he held his sober discourse with Miss Windish and the child; “a nice charge indeed, while, as he truly says, he has nothing.”

But even with the reflection, there flashed before him a memory which made him thoughtful for a minute. It was the recollection of Sir Henry Wotton's lines, and—though he would

not have owned it—he knew quite well why the thought of Scot brought three of them so forcibly to his mind—

Whose armour is his honest thought ;
Whose conscience is his strong retreat ;
Who having nothing, yet hath all.

CHAPTER V.

THAT afternoon Rose Levey was alone in the morning-room at Osborne House. She had been sitting idly there for hours; and now, while the dusk of the Winter day deepened slowly around her, her eyes were weary of their strained gaze out into the garden, and her brain was weary of its one constant, narrow thought.

So it was a great relief to her to hear the grating sound of wheels upon the gravel; though no one could have guessed this, when she raised her eyebrows so languidly upon her sister's entrance.

"Did you not see him, then?"

"Really, Rose," answered Violet, throwing herself down upon a couch, "what do you mean?"

"Did you match the silk?" questioned Miss Levey, scorning a reply which she knew to be unnecessary.

"Yes, I matched the silk," returned the younger sister, very slowly and cautiously drawing off her tightly-fitting gloves; "but they had only five yards left. That will just make the alterations in my own dress; but I don't know what you are to do."

"What else?" asked Miss Levey curtly. The broad, complacent smile upon her sister's face angered her sorely in her present mood; but no glimpse, however broad, of the family selfishness could surprise her.

"I went to the library," continued Violet, dropping her words in a leisurely manner, as she folded her gloves together, "and then, having a few minutes to spare, I called on Mrs. Porter—and Felix was there."

"I thought so."

"Did you?" questioned Violet, chillily. "Then perhaps you know that he drove me part of the way home?"

"Yes."

"He would have come all the way," resumed Violet, with intense complacency—for did it not

naturally engender complacency to imagine her elder sister jealous of these pleasant, lover-like attentions?—"only he had an engagement for dinner. I was very glad he came, because we were able to have a little talk about our own affairs; Major Porter was so full of the reports there are about this inquest, and Scot Monkton, that—where's Bernard?"

"I have not seen him since he went to the inquest. What was it Major Porter said?"

"Oh, really, Rose, you don't expect me to remember all the things he chose to worry about. Please to ring for lights and tea."

"*You may,*" returned Rose, strong and calm in the immunity of seniority. "As you take such care to remember that you are the younger, please take equal care to remember that I am the elder."

"I ring simply because I want a cup of tea," explained Violet, with remarkable placidity. "That's Bernard, I suppose. No one else bangs the hall door as he does."

Mr. Levey came into his sisters' room at once; perhaps summoned by the showy symphony which Violet played when she had rung the bell and thrown off her hat and jacket,

perhaps simply because he appreciated the institution of five-o'clock tea. Rose, still in her seat before the window, while the shadows crept heavily about her, waited, in an eager suspense, for the cessation of her sister's chords.

"Come, Violet," said Mr. Levey, standing on the rug and tenderly warming his long white fingers, "that will do till after dinner; then you shall sing us the whole of the opera, if you like, while we sleep—eh, Rose?"

"Did you go to the inquest, Bernard?" inquired his elder sister, still without turning.

"Yes, I went with Colonel Egerton, as I said I should."

"Love me, love my father," put in Violet, still playing, in a laudable endeavour to exhibit the inefficiency of a brother's command.

"No fresh light was thrown on the matter at all," resumed Bernard, with a smile of supreme indifference to Violet's chords and cadenzas; "the only awkward thing was that Colonel Egerton's coachman was called to explain a fact he seems to have gossiped about, not thinking that it signified. As he drove the carriage home, on the night of our ball, he saw Mr. Monkton

galloping fast from the Green Pits, up to the high road, and across it towards Comely Place. The jury would not believe it, because he must have ridden over that unsafe little wooden bridge; but, when appealed to, he said, 'Yes, it was quite true.'"

"Well?"

"Well, there the matter rested, of course. I thought Monkton turned a little pale, but Porter said—No, he was just as ever. Colonel Egerton was vexed that the man had said anything; and I saw him very angry with the fellow afterwards; but he laughed with his daughter, and said he didn't know why he should have objected to Evans giving such trifling and useless evidence."

"You have been to the Dower House, then?" put in Violet, half turning on her stool, though her hands still ran up and down the keys of the piano.

"Yes—why not? Doris Egerton would have been dull enough to-day if I had not, for no one had called before she went out. Then Major Porter came, and I rode with him into Minton. He is absurdly put out about the whole thing."

"What whole thing?"

"You see there is an uncomfortable feeling abroad now about this fire. Some one has said—or rather, I believe, some two or three people have said—that Scot Monkton set fire to his own barns, for his own purposes."

"Oh, Bernard!" cried Violet, rising quickly from the piano now, "*that's* what they all meant at Major Porter's. But I couldn't understand; and I was so sick of the subject, because it made Felix dull. Tell us what it is. Major Porter is so awfully angry about it."

A servant had entered the room, and was shutting out the weird shadows, but still Rose did not stir; and, while her younger sister poured out the tea, and her brother revelled in the warmth of the wide blaze, she still sat with her face half turned away, her eyes dim in their gaze.

"It is very strange, if you come to look into it," continued Mr. Levey, sipping his tea between the words. "Monkton had been tremendously bothered by this foreigner—Australian, or whatever he was—and yet had been known to want certain family papers which the man would not give up without being paid a good price for them, as they touched upon *his* family history as

well as the Monktons'. It was quite a natural thing for the man to want money, but Monkton wouldn't give it. I believe he tried to lower the terms, but could not. Then, when these papers came so mysteriously into his possession at last—why, it is almost natural people should say what they do."

"What do they say—exactly?"

"Rose, how you startled me!" said her brother, with a laugh. "I didn't remember you were there. Why, they say of course—I don't mean *of course*, but they say, not without some reason—that the whole matter looks strange and suspicious. Pass the sugar, Vi."

"Who says that?"

"Really, Rose, how can Bernard tell?" put in Violet, impatiently. "Will you come and take your tea, or leave it here to grow cold? For Bernard doesn't seem inclined to venture with it into the darkness where you are."

"Darkness?" echoed Rose, rising and turning her stiff, colourless face upon them. "Darkness in this glaring light? Do we ever have anything but a glare of light in this wretched—in this house?"

"Is your head bad?" inquired Bernard, looking at his sister, surprised.

"No, thanks ; finish this story of the inquest, please."

"I've told you all I know. There's a Mr. Monkton staying at Minton, who Major Porter fancies must be at the bottom of it all ; but still we cannot understand how it should have been whispered out here, before this cousin of young Monkton's seems to have been here at all."

"What whispered?"

"You are beautifully dull to-night, Rose," observed her sister, refilling her own cup with her usual languor ; "I can see it all at a glance. This man possessed certain papers which were of value to Mr. Monkton, and coveted by him, though he could not obtain them. He always hated the man, and others knew it. Now the man has met a violent death on Scot Monkton's premises, and the documents are in Scot Monkton's possession, Don't you see what many people may say ? I don't say it myself—I should be very sorry to be so suspicious—but many people would ; I can see that plainly. The world is so ready to condemn, even when things do not look very suspicious ; so that in such a case as this, when they really *do* look suspicious——"

"I see that you are very unsuspecting yourself," remarked Rose, calmly. "Has Miss Egerton heard this, Bernard?"

"No, she had not when I was there this morning; but even I had not understood it then."

"She never hears things of this kind," put in Violet; "but she ought to hear this."

"Yes," assented Rose, and for the first time since her brother's entrance she dropped her eyes, bringing the heavy lids over them entirely, as if for momentary rest and relief. I shall go to-morrow and tell her."

"I will come too," said her brother, assuming a coldness which was exaggerated even for him. "I suppose she ought to know—you girls understand that sort of thing best—and I shall leave it to you; but I shall be there too."

"You must go without me, Rose," said her sister, presently. "Felix may come out to-morrow morning, and of course I must not be away."

"Of course not," observed Miss Levey, in a chilly parenthesis, as she left the room.

This was not true of Scot Monkton. There was not a word of truth in it—Rose felt quite

certain of this, as she walked slowly backwards and forwards in her dressing-room, regardless of her maid's hints that the dinner-bell would ring in a few minutes. No, not a word of truth; and yet how low it would bring him! She could not help that—she would help it if she could, but it was impossible. So he must suffer and be shunned. Then—if it were so—and she were true and never believed it—and if he could feel this, and grow dependent upon her! Ah, might not this be the very one touch that was needed to bring down that cool and proud reserve of his, which nothing else would break, because it was hidden so safely under his pleasant, courteous manner? If so——

Rose snapped the thought, purposely and resolutely, by summoning her maid in haste; and through the long and solemn dinner she talked so much, and with such unusual rapidity, that her brother and sister exchanged many glances of slow astonishment.

But that night, long after Bernard and Violet were asleep, Rose sat writing beside her neglected fire.

When she put down her pen at last, she had

half a dozen sheets filled upon her desk, and very slowly and carefully she read each one through. After that, one by one, she dropped them into the fire—all except one, which she read a second time and folded and put into an envelope.

Then she rose and prepared for bed, leaving the letter, unsealed and unaddressed, upon her desk.

When, half an hour afterwards, she came up to the table to extinguish the candles, she took the letter up again, and held it in her hand, musing, with her eyes upon its unlettered cover. Presently, very slowly and deliberately, and with firm, cool fingers, she drew the sheet of paper from the envelope, opened it upon her desk, and added one line at the foot of the page—a line written neatly and firmly, and containing only these words—

“You shall repay me in any manner, and at any time, that you may choose.”

Then she refolded the letter and replaced it in its envelope; fastening it securely now, holding her finger-tips upon the purple crest steadily for many seconds.

And this letter, addressed to Scot Monkton,

was to be posted by herself, before she went in the morning to tell Doris Egerton of the foul suspicion which it had effusively rebutted.

CHAPTER VI.

JUST at the time when Miss Levey was writing her letter, Anna Wakeley stood at her cottage door, her eyes vainly trying to pierce the darkness, and her ears strained to catch any sound, however faint or distant.

Not until the impenetrable darkness of the Winter night had enfolded the scene, had Anna ventured thus upon the outer step of her cottage. All day the key had been turned in the lock, and she had sat far back in the kitchen, her hands busy over her sewing, but her eyes heavy and uncertain, and her heart aching in the silence and solitude. But now she had opened the door, as if the darkness—or the terror—which had for so many hours been telling upon her, had robbed her of all fear; and, with one hand upon her heart, she stood gazing and listening.

Yet, when a step at last drew near, she started hurriedly back into the kitchen, and stood there with her fingers on the handle of the open door.

"I heard you coming, Oliver, so I opened the door."

He staggered across the threshold of the little dwelling, and its neatness and purity seemed to vanish in a breath.

"Anybody bin here?" he inquired, sitting down at once before the fire, his chin dropping on his breast, though he looked up at his wife.

"No."

"Not all day?"

"No."

"Then ye've not 'eard about the doin's down at the p'lice-court?"

"No."

Quiet and indifferent the answers all sounded; yet Anna's heart was beating with real pain in every throb, and it was only by an effort that she could hold back other words, which struggled to her lips in her impatient fear of what might follow.

"D'ye want to know."

"Yes."

"Then it'll do ye good to wait a bit."

"I can wait."

The man looked up again from his sleepy gaze upon the fire—looked straight up into his wife's face with a curiosity which amounted almost to admiration.

"Ye're well trained, my girl," he said then, in lazy satisfaction, "for ye don't worry a man's life out, like some of 'em do. Yes," he continued, falling back to his first position, "that's over; and the jury said as he got himself accident'ly killed."

"Accidentally killed."

Anna repeated the words with a long-drawn breath of relief, and for the first time she looked fully into her husband's face.

"That was their opinion," resumed Oliver, unmoved, "this mornin'; but by this time, so it strikes me, they're thinkin' diff'rent."

"What do you mean?"

"They're thinkin', I'll warrant, as it's very odd as a man young Monkton wanted to get rid on, should ha' found his death on young Monkton's property, and should ha' left 'im the papers as a few days ago he'd ha' given all his

money to get 'old on. *That's* what they'll be thinkin' about this time, I'll wager."

"Do you imagine," asked Anna, standing stiff and white before her husband, "that the world will believe any lies you choose to invent—you, a man who has been in prison already nearly twenty times? *You?*"

"Go on," said Wakeley, in a tone of maudlin contempt. "Go on; I like a little change sometimes—it does the best on us good. Rouse yerself and give it me. But let me tell ye, afore ye begin, as it's wasted time and fuss. D'ye think other men can't go to gaol as well as me. It'll be more of a change for young Monkton than 'tis for me, but p'raps in time he'll get as used to it."

"If you make any attempt to fix your vile suspicions upon the young Squire's head," said Anna, throwing out her clasped hands towards the man, "I shall go before those gentlemen—those very gentlemen who said to-day that Mr. Sourdy had died accidentally—and I shall tell them all I heard you and him arrange, about setting fire to the Green Pits. I shall tell them," she continued, heedless of her husband's fierce attempt to stop her, and raising her voice,

“how you *would* have done this on a certain night a month ago, only you were disturbed and alarmed ; and how you would have done it any night since, only you were in gaol, and he was away ; but that now you yourself—tired of waiting for the other man——”

“You’ll keep quiet, that’s what *you’ll* do,” retorted Wakeley, all the more savagely that he had been made to listen so long. “Do ye think, even if ye was allowed to say it, that anyone ’ud believe such a tale? Don’t people know we was chums—me and the furriner—and would they believe I’d kill and burn ’im? And then don’t everybody know as he and Monkton was foes, and—don’t that show it all? A fair jury’ll try him. Nobody’s goin’ to say out what he’s done ; we’ll only jest get ’im asked in public, and leave the rest to a jury as ’ull know.”

“Who will do it?” asked Anna, very low.

“A relation of his own—a gent as had no more cause to love him nor I and the furriner had. He’s in Minton now, and I don’t expect he’ll go far away till——”

“Be quiet!” cried Anna, shrilly, in her great misery.

"Oh, I'll be quiet," said Wakeley, in a satisfied tone of conciliation; "I've no wish to entertain ye against yer will, and let me 'vise ye not to werrit yerself any more about what don't concern ye. He understands well enough what he's about—this other Monkton—and he'll manage without you, though ye mayn't think it, coz women is sich 'eaps o' conceit. He'd managed without me too, I dur say, though I'll 'elp 'im a bit 'ere and there. Why shouldn't I?"

"You!" echoed Anna, with a scorn which made her eyes literally flame. "You, to whom Philip Sourdy owes his death!"

"Stuff!" sneered Wakeley, though he glanced round him in involuntary terror of her clear words. "His death's on his own shoulders, nobody else's, for the matter o' that. If he 'adn't gone in there, what matter the ricks burnin'? But then"—with a sudden recollection of the bearing of his own words—"why should young Monkton have set fire to 'em, if the furriner 'adn't been there?"

"If his death is on his own shoulders," said Anna, with a full cold gaze, under which he shrank uncomfortably, for all his rough defiance,

"why are you going to try to lay it on the young Squire, who would never raise a hand against a hundred such men?"

"I ain't a-going to lay it on to him. I'm only goin' to 'elp a gent to look into it all."

"I shall see that gentleman, and tell 'im all the truth," said Anna, speaking with decision.

"Now look 'ere," interposed Wakeley, rising at last, and approaching his wife menacingly; "ye'd better say no more about it. Ye're only talking like an idjet, and it'll be safer to say nothin'; safer for ye a deal, and so I tell ye oncet for all. There's nothin' *you* can say in any court in the world, as I've told ye before, as can 'urt me—no, not if ye invent the cleverest lie out. It can't be done, my girl, and so I tell ye oncet for all. If this gent as is staying at Minton—I've seen him along of the furriner more nor oncet, and I know he's sharp to do what he chooses—wishes to see jestice done agin young Monkton, why, I'd be sorry to be one to stop 'im; and, as I know the furriner and all about 'im better nor any one else 'ere does, why, I dur say he'll want my 'elp, and pay for it. I'll be glad enough, too, to balk young Monkton at last, I can tell ye, and 'special his

sharp lawyer. Hullo! What's the matter with ye?"

"Nothing," said Anna, groping her way backwards from him. "Stay there; nothing is the matter with me—nothing. Only—I must think how I can save him—stand back!—and escape—from you!"

CHAPTER VII.

MISS LEVEY had devoted even more than the fashionable number of minutes to her call at the Dower House, before she had, with sufficient dexterity, paved the conversational path to that one subject which was uppermost in her thoughts. Her brother had improved the opportunity with his usual complacency, and was even yet happily unconscious of Doris's weariness of his remarks so smilingly inane, and his compliments so broadly shallow. But Rose had risen to leave now, and had paused beside the window, making a casual remark upon the weather, as she looked out across the frost-bound scene. In this unsettled posture, and in this last minute, she could throw into her prepared speech the spontaneity of an after-thought.

"Whenever I look across the park I fret that

Mr. Monkton is not back at Kingswood. Don't you, Miss Egerton?"

"Scarcely so often as that," said Doris, "because I look across the park so constantly from these windows."

"And I suppose it is too late now," continued Rose, absently, "for him to return at all."

"Why should we think so, Miss Levey?"

"Because—— But have you not heard about the inquest?"

Rose spoke with an ease carefully and elaborately studied, but she could make it in no way akin to that natural ease with which Doris had questioned her.

"Yes, I have heard about the inquest. Papa was there."

"I told you Colonel Egerton was there, Rose," put in Bernard, wondering a little at his sister's preamble.

"Ah, yes, so you did," assented Miss Levey, with every appearance of a sudden recollection. "But, now I think of it, Bernard, you never told us what Colonel Egerton said of that disagreeable suspicion."

"What suspicion?" inquired Mr. Levey, who, in Doris Egerton's presence, invariably

found his mind clear of irrelevant matters.

"It is very pleasant for you if you have managed to forget already," observed his sister, pathetically; "I wish I could. But it has been a matter of such very painful surprise to me," she added, looking steadily into Doris's face, "that I shall never again be *able* to forget, I fear."

"What is it?" asked Doris, totally at a loss to understand her companion's manner.

"I will tell you," Rose said, the kind concession an apparent effort to her; "only it seems so strange that you haven't heard it, when everybody else has. Bernard, how did it arise—this unpleasant whispering against Mr. Monkton?"

"I don't know anything about it," replied Mr. Levey, pettishly. He was not gifted with many very tender or acute perceptions, but still he could see that Miss Egerton's face had changed a little, and that it would be better for Rose to say no more.

But Miss Levey thought otherwise, and calmly—more calmly, even, than she could have framed the words in thought to herself—she rehearsed now that vile suspicion which had been planted

by Stanley Monkton, in his jealousy and avarice, and by Oliver Wakeley, in his greed and malice.

Very still Doris stood to listen, her eyes bright in their questioning incredulity ; but her heart beating so hurriedly that the tiny bunch of laurustinus in her dress rose and fell as it might have done if the Winter breeze had been rocking it upon its stem.

"Yes?" she queried, when Rose's voice, apparently unmoved, had ceased.

"It is very sad," Miss Levey added, wondering why Doris should fancy she had not said all she meant to say. "It is a dreadful idea to consider Mr. Monkton guilty of such a crime—it would be such an awful crime!"

"The whole idea is like a jest—so very, very absurd!"

Mr. Levey moved uneasily from that clear gaze of Doris's, which had passed from his sister to himself. It would have been far better not to say a word, if this were the way in which it was to be taken. So very unpleasant it was to be made uncomfortable by a girl who *could* be so pretty and so charming as Doris.

"I am excessively sorry for the whole affair,"

resumed Rose, angry with Doris for the haughtiness which looked so curious upon her young lips; "I'm sorry your coachman had that awkward evidence to give, and I'm sorry those letters and the photograph fell into Mr. Monkton's hands."

"They were all utterly worthless to him; Mr. Bradford told us so this morning."

"So I suppose," returned Rose, with a slow, cold smile; "but how could Mr. Monkton know that until he got possession of them, and examined them? Besides, it looks strange—to other people, I mean—that this Frenchman, who had long worried Scot Monkton, should disappear so strangely."

"Strangely!" echoed Doris, her white lips parting with frigid contempt. "Have you not heard the circumstances of his death, then; Miss Levey?"

"Oh, I myself know exactly how it must have occurred," replied Rose, with haste or annoyance—even her brother could not tell which—"You do not for an instant imagine that I doubt Mr. Monkton's innocence, do you, Miss Egerton? No, I am only telling you what is said. I suspect nothing; I only tell

you what I hear. I am myself sure that Mr. Monkton need not fear things being looked into, and I trust that he will, in time, explain all that looks unpleasant and incomprehensible now."

"I think Mr. Monkton never does a thing which is incomprehensible—except, perhaps, to such natures as Oliver Wakeley's."

"I only mean," put in Rose, hardly knowing what she resented in this quiet speech, "what looks so odd to others—certainly not to myself."

"Certainly not to yourself?" questioned Doris, her clear, sad gaze full upon Miss Levey's face.

"No."

"Then nothing he does is ever incomprehensible to us," the girl went on, very earnestly and gravely; "and, as we cannot understand the thoughts of others, shall we let them go, please, as beyond our comprehension? If we do them injustice, we have no right to complain if they do *him* injustice. Shall we leave the matter, Miss Levey?"

"I hope," resumed Rose, smiling coldly as she offered Doris her hand in farewell, "that

Mr. Monkton will himself make all clear soon. If it is true that he was really away from home when the fire broke out, and came home with the child afterwards (betraying no surprise at all) I hope he will still be able to give a reason for it."

"Yes, I declare his coolness then was odd, was it not?" put in Bernard, with sudden energy, as the idea seemed to strike him for the first time—and he was apparently very grateful to it for doing so.

"You have known Mr. Monkton a great deal longer than I have," said Doris, gently; "so of course you know, far better than I do, that he is one who would be very cool in a great crisis, and at any time would scarcely parade his feelings, whatever they were.

Quite motionless Doris stood when her visitors had left her, her eyes far off beyond the bare Winter trees, and her hands closed together upon her breast. But when, an hour afterwards, Colonel Egerton returned, and called her cheerily from the hall—he always did this, just as if it were not home until her bright face greeted him—she came up to him swiftly and lovingly, and there were no tears in her

eyes, and no cloud upon her brow.

"I know," she had said to herself, after that thought which, in its longing, had travelled steadily beyond the mists, and brought back faith and trust, "that all will be ordered well."

Though without Miss Levey's preparation it might have taken days and weeks for Doris to comprehend the base suspicions which were at first so faintly whispered in the neighbourhood; yet, after that kindly preparation, it was cruelly easy to detect the tainted under-current which by no effort could she touch and purify, and of which it seemed to her, now in her restless new anxiety, that only Scot himself was ignorant. Calumny was altogether such a new lesson to the girl, in her innocent and loving life, that now, when it came so suddenly before her in its most hideous form, of course it was hard to learn the lesson. And no wonder was it that, in spite of the steadfast trust that all would be ordered well, the learning of this lesson saddened the young face whose richest beauty was its intense and ready sympathy.

Colonel Egerton grew day by day more uneasy about his daughter. He took to watching her anxiously, and keeping her beside him

by every loving fraud. He proposed a houseful of visitors—a stay in London—a trip to the Continent. He lavished tenderness upon her, and yet was not satisfied with her own clinging affection. He prognosticated the most marvellous success and fame for Kenneth, yet was not satisfied with her merry acquiescence. He proposed impossible diversions, and yet was not satisfied with her bright and gentle laugh.

“It is of no use,” he would say to himself, only allowing the thought, after she had left him. “This trying suspense for Kenneth is wearing her out. Well, it must soon be over, at any rate, and, in the meantime, I will not worry her. She feels it almost more than he does himself. I wish he had stuck to his profession like a man; and yet—God bless him!—I never wish him other than what he is, when I see him with my darling.”

And so the thought would end with a smile, perhaps, as Doris re-appeared; and she, trying so hard not to let a trouble of hers shadow her father's life, never knew that he missed any joyousness in her voice, or any gladness in her smile. And eyes one shade less loving than her father's would have been easily deceived by

this brightness of the loving and unselfish spirit.

One day, about two weeks after Miss Levey's call at the Dower House—a call which had not yet been returned—Colonel Egerton went up to London, and brought Miss Bradford home with him. His delight was so great to see how his motherless girl rejoiced at her aunt's coming, that he said, laughing, that Kenneth ought to have come too, to remind her that she was grown up.

And so it amused them all when, on that very evening, Kenneth unexpectedly arrived. They had not heard the wheels stop at the door; and, when he came first into the brilliant lamplight, there was a few moments' odd and unaccountable pause before the glad and hearty greeting. Yet no one could have explained this pause. It had not been because Kenneth looked ill. As far as any of them could have told, it was a sudden acute sympathy with that feverish excitement of happiness which was at first literally painful in its intensity—but then not one of them ever *did* try to dissect it. Not even Doris, though from that very moment she was just the Doris of old days, whose life belonged to these

three who loved her so well, and was made glad and perfect by their love. She brought her thoughts, perplexed and tangled, to Kenneth, and fancied that he unravelled them for her; while he felt that her very presence strengthened him, and that her hopefulness was preparing him, as nothing else could, for the test which was so near now.

The date was fixed for the first representation of his drama; and, though he was so enthusiastic, there were times of reaction after the long, tense strain when—hard as he struggled against it—he was weighed down by that depression of deep and colourless thought which, as long as genius lives, must alternate with its brilliant gleams of anticipation.

And in every mood Doris was a true companion—merry at times, making Kenneth fancy he was a boy again in the old Richmond garden, spending a half-holiday with his pet playmate—thoughtful at times, uttering only thoughts which, by their own pure brightness, showed him the sunshine on his own—enthusiastic at times, with beautiful and ideal aspirations, the very wildness of which calmed his own visionary fervour, and turned it into mirth—and quiet

at times, with a soothing in her very silence, like the soft, mute touch of her hand on his. A true companion in every mood, because she thought always of him, and never of herself.

"It is so sad, my darling," he said, one day, when he had been talking sadly—as he often did—of the wide lessons of failure that he had lately learned in the lives of literary men, "to see the gradual death of *hope*, even while the talents live. I suppose it must be easy to grow idle and heedless then; and I should like (all through my life) to be able to help such as those, Doris, if I could."

"Of course you can, Ken, because you are industrious and earnest."

"You know whose influence has kept me safe, my darling. Do you remember, in Lilly's epilogue to *Campaspe*—'Where the rainbow toucheth the tree, no caterpillar will hang on the leaves; where the glow-worm creepeth in the night, no adder will go in the day?'"

"Your guard," said Doris, softly, "is your love for your art, Ken. But is it quite true that so many men are struggling unnoticed? Walk slowly, Kenneth, and let us think if there is not something even we can do."

It was just at that moment that Scot Monkton joined them, from the wood near which they were strolling in the pleasant wintry morning; and he found out easily, in his keen, pleasant way, of what they were talking. Then, though he spoke without one shade of Kenneth's warmth and eagerness, Doris fancied that the subject had grown widely serious, and that it would be a lifelong memory with them all.

That afternoon Mr. Bradford appeared at the Dower House, as suddenly and unexpectedly as his son had done a week ago; and when Doris first looked into his harassed face, she knew what report had brought him to Kingswood.

"You have heard, of course," he said, looking round with his grey eyebrows lowered, when in his impatience he had opened the subject at once. "A glaring lie, which could reach me in town, must have passed you here."

But still he spoke as if they had not, seeming glad to find vent for a little of the astonishment, and the wrath, and the contempt which had moved him so unusually, and yet which he was too practised a lawyer thoroughly to betray even here.

"I am very glad you are come, and have

heard of this vile slander," said Colonel Egerton, hotly. "I long to grapple the spy by the throat and expose him."

"Does the spy mean the lie itself, or Wakeley, the inventor of it?" asked Miss Joan.

"If it were only Wakeley's lie, it might soon be kicked to death," observed Mr. Bradford. "What I don't like is Stanley Monkton's share in it. The shaft he has poisoned is more keen, and carries farther. Tell me all the evidence again, Egerton—slowly and coolly now, none of your heat-of-battle, please. First of all, what's this about your own coachman?"

"Yes," he assented, when Colonel Egerton had repeated his coachman's evidence. "And was Mr. Monkton really away when the fire broke out?"

"I see," he muttered, when he possessed all the particulars obtainable. "I see."

"What do you see, father?" asked Kenneth, earnestly. "What can be his cousin's motive in this contemptible slander of Scot Monkton?"

"Slander! Do you suppose that is all?"

"What else?"

"If Scot Monkton is taken up on this suspicion, and things go against him, he might

make a deed of gift, to avoid confiscation ; and of course this fellow, being the only one of the name, expects to come in for the property—he is pretty sure of it indeed. And I can tell you that *then* the mythical heir, for whose sake Kingswood is given up, may go to Erebus, for all the reigning Monkton will care.”

“Then confiscation for felony is not abolished yet ?” questioned Colonel Egerton, thinking over this scheme.

“Not yet ; though in this case it would make no difference. The law is easily evaded, and, previous to conviction—if conviction be pretty certain—a prisoner has only to make what we call a deed of settlement. But Scot Monkton,” added the old lawyer, coolly, “shall execute no such deed, while T. & C. Bradford are his legal advisers.”

“And this,” fretted Miss Joan, “is all through those papers.”

“For justice’ sake let us hear no more of that waste rubbish,” interrupted Mr. Bradford. “The papers were worth no more to Scot Monkton than Sourdets’ hat was. And they say, in their malice, how could he know this until he read them ? They say that, do they ?”

he sneered. "Let them say it—fools like Levey, and rogues like Stanley Monkton. Let them say what they like. Let them say that he has cleverly got rid of his enemy, and stolen valuable documents. Let them say it till they are tired of its sound, if they like; for we all know an old lawyer who wasn't born yesterday, eh? Doris," he added, with a sudden change of tone, "are you ready to go on an errand for me, my dear?"

"Quite ready, Mr. Bradford," she said, earnestly. She had stood very white and silent through all this conversation; but now she came up to him, and looked as "ready" as she said.

"Go down to the Black Birches, will you, and bring Miss Michal here to spend the rest of the day with you and Joan? Bring the child too. Take no denial, for I want to talk to Mr. Monkton alone. I've a hundred things to discuss with him, besides this one wretched affair which brought me in such haste. Now go, my dear; you will be more successful if you go alone. I cannot stand the presence of that tearful little woman and that staring child. Bring them both safely away, and I will go

down there at once. Do you mind walking alone, my dear?"

Doris nodded as she left the room; she could not tell in words what a real relief to her the walk would be.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOLITUDE was such a treat to Doris now, that she involuntary began to linger as soon as Kenneth had closed the shrubby gate behind her, and left her alone in the Larch Walk. The sun was low already, and the February moon, though her face was pale and wan, rose steadily and patiently even in the greater light, for she knew the night was coming, and her beauty would be brilliant when this fair glory of the setting sun should be forgotten.

Along the horizon the clouds stood like jagged and gigantic rocks against the soft green and golden light, and above stretched a wide, far view of silvery waters and a dreamy shore, which changed and moved and faded as Doris gazed, and yet was passing beautiful through all.

"It might be," she said, as she went slowly on, her eyes upon this fair sky-picture, "a glimpse of that angel-country where we shall all love each other, and where nothing dark, or mean, or suspicious——"

As she put into words, even thus indirectly, the vague and constant thought which puzzled her, the recollection of her present errand started up before her with a new distinctness. Mr. Bradford had made so light of it, in giving her her final directions, that she could scarcely have left home with any idea of importance in her mission; but now its imaginary weight grew out of her previous thoughts, and so, from that moment, her step never slackened until she had her hand upon the garden gate at the Black Birches, and her eyes upon Scot, who, crossing the garden just then, met her.

"Many happy returns of the day, Miss Egerton."

"Why?"

"Why?" he echoed, laughing, as he met her astonished glance. "Is it an ordinary black-letter day, then?"

Though her own knowledge of the motive of her visit blinded her to any idea of his real

pleasure (even though it shone in his eyes at that moment), Doris could understand him now; and she answered, with gravity, that she wished him many happy returns of the day too—finding that easiest to say. Then she hurried, at his side, up the garden path, and past the open doorway, over which the faded leaf of the *osmunda* slowly perished; though through all the ruth and ruin of the fire it had held its post.

It was baking-day at the Black Birches, and Miss Michal, half-enveloped in a white apron of no contracted proportions, fluttered beside the oven door, sighing over each loaf as it came brownly forth to face the world, and contradicting Elizabeth with plaintiveness when the girl pronounced each one, as she carried it to the table, "crisp and light."

"I don't think, my dear," the little lady said, resignedly, when Doris, standing in the blaze of the bright fagot fire, had, anxiously and cordially, urged her request, "that I ought to leave home this afternoon; there is so much to see to."

"Please, Miss Egerton, indeed there's nothing but what I can do," put in Elizabeth, really

wishful that her low-spirited mistress should have this change which Doris wished.

Then Scot (he stood before the fagot fire too, just with the old easy thoughtfulness, which left no room for either false pride or shame) joined his request to Doris's, and made the entreaty easier for her; so that, at last, Miss Michal was tempted to acknowledge, with a pensive smile, that it was not of vital importance that she should "see to" much that afternoon, and that, if Doris liked such a dull companion——

What answer was needed beyond the girl's gladness at this consent? And, though Scot seemed to wonder a little at it, he seemed glad too.

"It will do you such good, Aunt Michal," he said, warmly. "Now I will fetch Willy."

"I suppose you must," sighed Miss Michal, "though I'm sure he won't have finished his copy. He ought to be able to write, oughtn't he?" she inquired of Doris, as Scot went quickly from the room, and they prepared to follow him. "Yet, when I set him a copy, ten to one Scot comes and takes him off—if I let him. And I'm sure the scenes are utterly

ridiculous which Scot makes of his reading lessons—if I let him be present. My only comfort is, that the child is so very grave himself, that it takes a great deal to distract him from what he is told to do. But I believe that's the very reason Scot does it. He actually says that no little boy can possibly learn to read and write until he knows how to laugh and play. If the child wasn't really a sober, conscientious little thing, he would be utterly spoilt."

Sober and conscientious!

They had paused at the open door of the sitting-room, and Doris could not wonder another moment at the chosen term. The child sat rigidly in that painful attitude which is considered essential in a child's first writing lesson. With every muscle strained, his fingers grasped the long pen, lest they should lose the position in which Miss Michal herself had placed them; and, while his wide and anxious eyes were fixed conscientiously upon the far-away top line which was held up for his imitation, the slow tears fell singly upon the blotted lines, or on his strained, stiff finger-joints. And, all the while, the narrow little breast heaved with ex-

citement, and the thin cheeks flushed and paled with longing, because Scot sat on the table opposite, with his kind eyes full of fun, and because the child had said, "No, he would not," when Miss Michal had told him not to think of anything else until the page was written.

So, looking strenuously away from his great temptation, he handled his pen with infinite labour, and dared not set his fingers free, even to wipe away those hot tears which defaced each line that he had written.

"If the child wasn't really a sober, conscientious little thing, he would be utterly spoilt."

It had been Miss Michal's own speech, as Doris well remembered; yet Miss Michal herself had passed Doris now, and, bending beside the child, had taken the strained fingers in her own, pushed away his chair, and given him his freedom.

When she and Willy went away to prepare for their walk, and left Scot and Doris alone together, Doris sat down before the blotted copy, and read the words aloud—"bid, bad, bud"—after which Scot, standing near her, reversed them solemnly—"bud, bad, bid"—

and, when their different classification was exhausted, commented gravely upon their moral. And it might have been that, for both himself and Doris. the heart held no thought, and pain, and longing, no effort and no hope, beyond a new arrangement of these words.

"It seems to me," mused Miss Michal to herself, as she passed back through the hall, "that those two are laughing; yet I should think it would puzzle anyone to tell why."

It would indeed !

She had called Willy into the kitchen, and made him sit before the cheerful wood fire, while Elizabeth warmed and put on his boots ; and now the blaze from the dry branches leaped beyond the figures on the hearth, doing its best to leave a touch of its own warmth and strength upon Miss Michal's features, and of its own ruddy health upon the white face of the child.

"Listen, ma'am. Isn't it wheels?"

Elizabeth looked up to ask the question, while she knelt buttoning Willy's boots ; but Miss Windish was drawing on her gloves placidly.

"There was an enormous stranger on the parlour grate to-day," she said, "so I knew he

coming. He can go into the parlour now to your master, Elizabeth. Miss Egerton and I are going out at once."

"And if it's a lady, ma'am?" inquired Elizabeth, rising, and stroking down her apron.

"It's not a lady," rejoined Miss Windish, with mild fervour. "What is it you want, Willy?"

"May I say good-bye, just for a minute, to Liath, please?" asked the child, standing pleading in the firelight.

Miss Michal nodded without a word, and so he ran through the back door, and was bidding a solemn farewell to Liath in the Green Pits, when Miss Michal, small and limp, in a looped-up skirt and a boa of great length and foregone fashion, went in to join Doris.

"Ah, yes, I thought so," she ejaculated, though she started a little at the loud knocking on the front door. "I heard a carriage pass round from the farm gate. I dare say it's Major Porter. Scot, shall you go out with him if he wants you?"

"Impossible," returned Scot; and then he caught himself smiling, because there had darted into his mind a fancy that Doris had waited

almost breathlessly for his reply. "I cannot leave home to-day. But why should it be Porter? Certainly that was not his knock. Soldier as he is, he would never discharge such a cannon at the door."

"Are you ready then, Miss Windish?" asked Doris, bright and content in the relief of finding that Scot would be at home to see Mr. Bradford. "And is Willy ready?"

"Yes, he's ready," sighed Miss Windish; "but then he has to bid good-bye to Scot, and if he's as long over it as he generally is——"

The little lady paused abruptly, and, in her soft and silent way, moved back from the door as it was opened to admit two visitors. She had not been mistaken in that infallible augury of the morning, for here was emphatically a "stranger;" and yet she had been deceived too, for only a single banner had waved upon the bar of the grate, and here were *two* strangers.

They both glanced round at her, and in her quiet way she bowed—a small, fragile figure, but a calm little lady, nevertheless, in this moment of simple astonishment.

And Doris, sitting at the table, softly turned the pages of an open book, and waited.

Scot had risen from his impromptu seat on the arm of the couch near Doris, but he leant there, waiting too. To him also these visitors were strangers, and—quizzical a little, though scarcely curious—he waited their errand.

“Mr. Monkton,” said one of the men, the elder of the two, pausing near the door, and speaking in haste, as if to forestall his companion, “I am Superintendent Davies, of Minton, and this is police-constable Hewis. You, I presume, know why we are here. It is a most unpleasant business, but, if you will understand, to begin with——”

“What he understands, to begin with, won’t make any difference in the unpleasantness of the business, I fear, and won’t alter our warrant,” interrupted the younger man, approaching Scot. “He shall read it himself if he likes, but we of course must do our duty.”

“What is that?”

“Arrest you,” said the constable, stepping up to Scot, and standing straight before him as he spoke.

The words had scarcely left the man’s lips, when Scot rose from his leaning posture, threw his weight on his left leg, and, raising his

closed right hand, struck out straight as an arrow, and knocked the constable to the ground.

It was done so promptly as well as coolly, and so surely, as well as easily, that it was no wonder the second man did not hasten to shorten, between himself and Scot, that space in which his fallen comrade lay.

"Step over him," advised Scot. "Come, I am ready."

With a shriek of fear Miss Michal started forward.

"Oh! Scot, my dear, oh! Scot, remember they are two to one!"

"Two to one, certainly," said Scot, very calm in the white heat of his passion; "two cowards."

"Of course, Mr. Monkton, if you behave to us in this manner," began the elder man, coming slowly forward, "I shall be forced to use means to ensure your submission."

"Handcuffs?" asked Scot, in a tone which made Doris's heart grow like lead, in literal fear of its curbed fury. "A capital idea to insure safety for you both! Be cautious; your friend will have recovered his breath in a few minutes,

and then, perhaps, if you come together, and with the irons in your hand, you may venture to do your duty. Two to one is the usual advantage on the side of innocence and justice. Try it."

"We had no wish to use these," said the Superintendent, opening the handcuffs with evident unwillingness.

"Even saints and martyrs are at times forced to act against their wish, for the good of others," observed Scot, in a tone of easy banter, which was so horrible to Miss Michal that she gave vent to another shriek.

"I would still rather not do it, if you would give us your word," the man resumed, glancing pitifully down on the little lady.

"Oh! you had better use them!" returned Scot, lightly. "They are heavy toys to have carried so far for no purpose."

"If you had not used violence——"

"But I did," the young man interrupted, tranquilly; "so take refuge in your life-preservers, because life is so precious."

"Mr. Monkton, for your own sake——"

"That's kind—that's very kind and thoughtful of you," Scot said, still in that bantering

tone which was so terrible to Miss Michal. "Do it for my sake, pray. I read to-day of a struggle between a madman and his keeper, which ended in the madman's death. They called it wilful murder. What matter? They are simple words enough, and only two of them. I daresay you are used to such sounds, and not *afraid* of whispering them into a prisoner's ear, eh? Yes, put the irons on—for my sake."

"Mr. Monkton, if you would kindly recollect that we are here simply in the discharge of our duty," began the elder man; but by this time his companion had taken the manacles, and, opening them, had advanced, without further hesitation, to put them on.

Scot coolly lifted his hand, and laid his fingers on the iron rings.

"Are they strong enough?" he asked; and in the next instant, swift as thought, with a true backward aim, he had flung the handcuffs through the closed window behind him.

As they went crashing through the glass, Doris suddenly fell on her knees beside Miss Michal, who sat staring into Scot's face, with her eyes dry and wild. This scene was so far

more terrible to the girl than anyone could guess, that it was little wonder she hid her face and sobbed, even here, where no comforting words could be uttered.

For the first time, Scot turned his eyes upon her, as the quick, suppressed sobs fell on that momentary silence; then he told the men that he was ready.

"You need not excite yourself," he remarked to the younger constable, who had begun to mutter angrily to his companion; "I am coming without the handcuffs. What have you waiting?—a prison van?"

"Only a cab, Mr. Monkton," put in the elder man, hurriedly intercepting any other reply.

"How very pleasant!" said Scot, preparing to leave the room; while even the rougher of the men felt, through all his distrust, that close watchfulness was hardly needed now, for Mr. Monkton evidently intended to accompany them as unresistingly as if he were really bound.

But at the door Scot paused.

"Go and take your own seats," he said to the men, in a voice so calmly authoritative that it was plain to see that, just then, he had

forgotten their errand, and his own position.

The elder man passed on, as if glad to do so; but, as his companion made no step forward, the words which Scot had meant to say died in his heart, unuttered. But Doris had risen now, and, for a minute, her eyes met his, with a long, wistful promise in their gaze—the promise of an undying trust, which shone there unknown even to herself.

“Do you not drive past the gate of the Kingswood Dower House.”

There are moments in our lives when action overtakes thought, and this was one for Doris. She stood beside the policemen, with a winning gentleness which even the rougher of them could not resist.

“Yes, we go that way, of course, miss.”

“Then will you kindly drive that lady so far? She and I were just going there when you arrived, and she will hardly care for the walk now, while I can walk very well, and will meet her there. I shall be so much obliged if you will do this.”

The men, though astonished a little, assented readily, and Miss Michal, far beyond the power of astonishment now, was assisted by Doris

herself into the seat beside which Scot would presently take his place.

"Good-bye," she said then, laying her hand in his, and leaving it in his clasp till the few simple words were said; "I will give your good-bye to Willy, and take care of him. At the gate at home you will see that I shall have left another message."

She had fancied she was going to cheer and encourage him; to remind him that injustice never prevailed for long, and that he would soon be back; or to utter, in a whisper, her own hope and prayer. But no; those were the only words that came, even though the men stood back, and she could speak unheard.

And Scot answered nothing but *good-bye*; for the words of wrath and irony were stayed while her sad eyes met his, and her hand lay so trustingly within his own.

Before the cab was out of sight, rolling along beside the river to the iron bridge in the park, Doris had crossed the stream, and was flying up the Larch Walk; running as she had not run since—a little child, unfettered by long skirts—she had proudly and breathlessly competed with Kenneth in merry races down the Richmond garden.

"Lloyd," she called, with failing breath, summoning her own groom as she passed the stables, "have the horses harnessed in the phaeton for Mr. Bradford—as quickly as possible. Help Evans yourself, that not a moment may be lost!"

Mr. Bradford, pacing the hall, impatient for Doris's return, put his arm round her as she darted up to him, and supported her while she regained her breath; but, as soon as he comprehended what she had to tell, he put her from him without a word, and left the house.

Then Doris, knowing he understood where to meet Scot, crept out again—without seeking Kenneth or her father or Miss Joan—and hurried back to the farm. And when she met little Willy wandering about the house, looking wistfully and patiently for Scot, she lifted him in her arms, and cried over him as if her heart were breaking.

CHAPTER IX.

THE kitchen of Wakeley's cottage was as silent as if it had been unoccupied, yet Anna was not alone this evening, as she was generally. With her arms thrown upon the table, and her face hidden on them, she sat as she had sat ever since Doris Egerton had come to her out of the darkness, white and quiet as a ghost, to tell her of Scot Monkton's arrest. Again and again Doris had called her by name, and now, nervous and impatient, the girl rose and stood upon the hearth. When Anna lifted her face at last, Doris started to see its deathly pallor, and the glazed dimness of her eyes.

"They'll get him free," she said, rising to face Doris, and speaking slowly, as if in bewilderment; "they will be clever men—they must set him free!"

"Surely you know," observed Doris, "why I came to you to-night, Anna? I could not rest until you had released me from that promise, which I made when you bade me warn Mr. Monkton to watch in his stack-yard. What you feared then, must give a clue to the source of this fire. Release me from my promise."

"I dare not," the woman answered, in a whisper.

"Then I must break it. Even if that be wrong to do, the keeping it would be far more wrong."

"You promised!" cried Anna, eagerly. "Miss Egerton, remember that you promised, before I told a word."

"I remember," Doris said, "but I will break that promise, before the innocent shall suffer for the guilty."

"He will not—he cannot," cried Anna, pushing the hair from her wan face, and holding her hands upon her temples. "They dare not touch him! Who will dare lie and say the Squire *murdered* the man he'd never given two thoughts to? They'll be clever men—they'll know right from wrong, and truth from falsehood."

"We know right from wrong, and truth from falsehood too," said Doris, with grave emphasis, "and we must do our part now."

"I cannot!" cried Anna, quick and shrill. "All will be right for him because he is innocent, but, if I——"

"Anna," said Doris, very solemnly, as she drew the woman's hot hands from her face, and held them in her own, "what do you fear? Tell me, while we two are here alone."

The woman shook her hands free, and started back.

"*Fear!*" she echoed, her eyes wild and dim in their fixed gaze on the girl's face. "Fear! You don't know what the word means. How can you? You would have been dead long ago if you had had to learn the lesson as *I've* learnt it. I am young still, as years go; but I seem to have lived through twenty lives—because the fear and shame which crowd every second that I live, drag it to a long day. What do I fear, you say! I do not know—I never know. And yet what is there that I do *not* fear? I—I cannot grasp it," she whispered, again pressing her hands upon her head. "I cannot see it; and yet it is about me always."

"It is your husband's presence," said Doris, speaking very clearly. "It is a hard life for you, Anna; but, when he is——"

The awkward and hurried opening of the cottage door interrupted Doris, but she did not move or shrink when Wakeley entered, and turned and locked the door behind him.

"What's that theer man skulkin' outside for?" he asked, roughly addressing his wife.

"The man outside," said Doris, with no tremor in her voice, while Anna took up her work in a sudden, unnatural calm, "is my servant."

"There's no call to leave men skulkin' outside," commented Wakeley, while through all his roughness it was evident that the reply had been a great relief to him. "I don't care for 'em about *my* cottage."

"You need not mind this one," said Doris, undaunted, for her clear gaze had read both the man's apprehension and his relief. "Of course, when we see an innocent man arrested (as Mr. Monkton was to-day) it makes the most innocent of us timid; but still only the man who is guilty of what they lay to the Squire's charge need be really afraid—as you were just then."

"If—you—please," said Oliver, insolently

accenting his words, "you'll leave no sneak-in' men about my door agin. That's all I've got to say to ladies as come wheer they ain't wanted."

Though her eyes were brilliant with passion, she suppressed all other trace of it, and left the cottage as soon as Oliver had unlocked the door. But Anna overtook her as she reached the garden gate.

"Miss Egerton," she whispered, breathlessly, "I said you'd left this behind you—Oliver isn't sober enough to have noticed what it was—I was so quick. It's his lantern—at least it was the Frenchman's. It turns dark in a minute; but it's a good light when you like. And your man will carry it. Here are matches. Oh! Miss Egerton——"

Anna paused here, drawing her breath in gasps, and so Doris, in simple compassion, could not pass on without a few words of comfort. But, for the brave, warm-hearted girl, these words were very cold and very quiet, and she did not offer to accept the lantern Anna proffered so anxiously. The woman would not, however, take this tacit refusal, and, after lighting it herself, with shaking fingers, she put it

into the hands of the butler who waited for Doris.

"I can have it back at any time," she said, in the same hurried whisper. "We don't use it. My husband never goes out to stay late now; he never has been out later than this since—since the shock of our lodger's death. Please be careful how you go, Miss Egerton. How dark it is!"

There is some skill required to use a dark lantern properly, and Fowles—from total lack of experience—proved himself deficient in this skill.

"Turn it dark, please," said his young mistress, when they neared the bridge in the park, "or put it out—that will be the best. Our eyes will soon grow accustomed to the darkness, and we shall find our way more easily."

So Fowles drew back the slide of the lantern, and blew out the candle—just in time for the slight act to be of untold importance.

* * * * *

"Do ye think that ye're in church to-night, that ye sit so still and mum?"

Oliver Wakeley was smoking his pipe on the hearth, with a jug of beer at his elbow; but it

was evident that, accustomed though he was to his wife's silence, he had resented it ever since Miss Egerton's departure.

"No, I feel as if I should never be in church again."

"Oh! you'll git over that," said Wakeley, with contempt. "Git supper now, and come to the fire; I'm sick o' seein' ye with a needle alwis in yer 'and. Do ye never spend any money as ye don't earn?"

"Never."

"Well, my girl, if you like it so, why, like it so. I'll say nothin' agin it, so long as I spend mine for myself. Now git up and make a man comfortable. I'm 'ome so reg'lar in the evenin's now—why don't ye show ye're glad on it? What did the Colonel's daughter say?"

"She told me about the Squire being taken up."

"Yes," said Wakeley, with a chuckle, "he's safe for a bit, wheer he's put me afore now. And she come to tell ye about it, did she? She must a thought ye cared a good bit about 'im. What did ye say yerself?"

"Nothing."

"That wur wise," he muttered, with a laugh,

as he shook the ashes from his pipe ; "ye're not an idjet, Anna, like most women is. I can see ye know what's best for ye. Why, o' course," he continued, bringing his hand heavily down upon his knee, "ye must know well enough by this time that if ye made up no end o' clever lies, it 'ud be no good. To begin with, nobody 'd believe a word, coz me and the furriner was chums, and coz 'im as wanted the papers took care to get 'em, And to end with, the law wouldn't let ye say anythin', if ye wanted to ever so bad. It's a good law, my girl, ain't it, as leaves me and you in peace together? Come, let's have a bit o' supper. Don't ye feel pleasant and easy, now ye know it's all taken out o' y'r 'ands, and ye can't 'elp yerself?"

"If my words would be of any use," said Anna, speaking quickly, as she moved to prepare the meal, "I should go and tell what you have often threatened to do—and what I heard you and Mr. Sourdy arrange to do—at the Green Pits. And I should tell about your return on the night of the fire. But it would be of no use, you say."

"No use," repeated Wakeley, roughly. "Draw me some more beer."

She went at once. Since he had taken to return home earlier, she had left off all her old arguments. When she returned with the beer, she saw in a minute how he was resenting her last words, leaning back in his chair, his hands in his pockets, and his chin on his breast.

"Put it down," he said, surlily, without looking up; "I don't care to see ye about 'ere."

"Will you come to supper?"

"No."

So Anna went back to her seat behind him, and for nearly an hour there was no sound in the cottage except the heavy, regular ticking of the Dutch clock. Then she rose and put away her work.

"You are sure you will eat no supper, Oliver?"

"No."

"Then I will put it away."

She went quietly and wearily about the task, but her face was calm and patient as it used to be, bearing no trace of the passion Doris had witnessed. And presently Oliver pushed back his chair upon the hearth, stood a minute to steady himself, and then felt his way up the steep cottage staircase.

CHAPTER X.

MR. BRADFORD paced slowly backwards and forwards in his own private office in Gray's Inn Square, pausing now and then in his walk, while a young man, who was the only other occupant of the room, wrote rapidly in a pocket-book which lay open on the table.

"No prospect of hunting out a confederate, I suppose, sir?"

"None," was the lawyer's curt rejoinder. But then he paused. "The hunting out remains with you," he said. "For Heaven's sake, hunt out all you can! But you'll find the rascal acted too cunningly to trust another rascal."

"When he is away, his wife is alone at the cottage?"

"Yes. I suppose I have said all now."

"I think so," the young detective answered, for, from the moment Mr. Bradford had left his seat and begun that slow march, he had known that his instructions were at an end. A shrewd decipherer of character always, he had long ago read the peculiarity of the old lawyer who sometimes employed him; and he knew that this restlessness never belonged to that concentration of thought which he gave to his profession. He must have some harassing and perplexing thought behind.

"Therefore," decided the young detective with himself, "he is anxious about this, beyond the usual anxiety for a client's case."

"About the pony, Mr. Bradford?"

"It will be put into your charge at Euston station to-morrow night. Go down in a groom's undress. Colonel Egerton will have a suit of livery ready for you."

"As I go to Kingswood an utter stranger," said the young man, coolly, "I shall, of course, know nothing of what has occurred, except what all the world is supposed to know. But, as I should like to be able to judge of what I am told, will you look over those first notes, and tell me if they are correct?"

"Quite correct," returned the lawyer, running his shrewd eyes down the lines. "The recognizances are his own, Colonel Egerton's, Major Porter's, and mine—two thousand pounds each. Heavy as the sureties seemed, half a dozen gentlemen came forward at once to offer them."

"And you think, Mr. Bradford," said the detective, quietly, as he replaced the book in his pocket, "that—setting aside any question of Mr. Stanley Monkton's ultimate design with regard to a commission of lunacy—they can really go through the case on a charge of manslaughter?"

"Emphatically *yes*. The prosecutor is as clever as he is vindictive, and the supposition (outrageous as it is) that Scot Monkton set fire to his barn to disable Sourdets, during his sleep there, will find a good deal of corroborating evidence, I foresee. Whether that evidence will bear daylight in a Court of Law, remains for *us* to prove. The notion of an arrest on such a charge, was a neat little conception, fresh from the birthplace of lies, and you had better appreciate its——"

"Exactly," put in the young man, coolly, in Mr. Bradford's pause; "that is the natural conclusion of a meditative mind."

He left the office then, and Mr. Bradford put up his papers, and turned his chair to the fire, waiting with an air of expectancy.

"At last!" he muttered, when a cab came dashing up the Square. "I think the trains that bring Kenneth are always the slowest trains on the face of the earth."

But there shone a pleasant light in the old man's eyes, for all his grumbling.

"Well?" he said, when his son entered. And Kenneth seemed to understand that even the *tone* was a welcome.

"I have done all I had to do, father," he said, standing opposite to him, by the fire. "I have paved the way for young Raine at the Dower House. Colonel Egerton fully comprehends."

"Egerton always was of the right sort," put in the old lawyer, parenthetically, "and so is his daughter. What of Mr. Monkton?"

"He is just as ever he was, I think," returned Kenneth, puzzled a little, it would seem. "He is working as usual on the farm,

and that child is with him constantly—whether that's most his doing, or Mr. Monkton's, I don't know, but I fancy it is the child's. A delicate little fellow he appears, with hardly any strength or spirit; yet, instinctively, he seems to know that Scot Monkton is under a cloud, and clings to him the more. You hardly credit it, father, but really I believe what I say."

"I suppose you do," assented Mr. Bradford, grimly. "I don't suppose that boy's experience has extended yet to anybody who is *not* under a cloud; but never mind him. Did you explain to Mr. Monkton how Raine was to go to the Dower House as groom, with that new pony which Doris is to lend the child?"

"Yes; and he said the rides would do the boy immense good."

"Pish! You told him that it was the young fellow who was with me in San Remo?—that he was only half French, and that I had great confidence in him?"

"Yes."

"I told you to speak particularly of my wish to trust Doris, as well as her father, with the secret, and ask his consent—did you?"

"Yes; but he didn't take any notice until I

repeated the question, and then he only said 'Yes.'"

"And what more did you expect? Go on," said the lawyer, impatiently, after a pause. "You've learnt more than that, surely; make haste. Do the people avoid him at all?"

"There are some who do, as you yourself told me before, father; but there are plenty who don't. They say Miss Levey is perpetually driving or riding to the farm."

"While her coxcomb brother, I suppose, keeps far enough away?"

"I believe he does. Then of course Aunt Joan, and Doris, and Colonel Egerton——"

"Oh! I understand all that. How does Miss Michal get on?"

"Not too smoothly," replied Kenneth, with an irrepressible smile. "She takes exception to her present lines, and—to do her justice—to Mr. Monkton's too."

"Trust her! Liath is still there, I suppose?"

"Certainly; but he seems in a kind of dream all the time. He cannot forgive himself for having picked up those papers, just to balk Wakeley. And his overpowering wonder is how anyone could possibly imagine that his master

would guess the letters to be in a metal case."

"So I should think ; but we will leave that question to our counsel, Kenneth."

"I've no fear for the verdict, father. Mr. Monkton is innocent, and they will pronounce him so."

"But that's not quite enough, lad. There's a guilty man somewhere, and he must be pronounced so too."

"Oh, I almost forgot to tell you one thing, father," said Kenneth, as they left the office, "though it was no message. I'm sure Doris is very anxious to see you."

"All right. I want to be down there for an hour or two before Raine arrives. Reynolds will see about his departure, and you must stick to the office to-morrow."

The morning train by which Mr. Bradford travelled stopped at the village station, but, though a fly was waiting there, he chose to walk on to Kingswood. He could, by taking a round, pass Oliver Wakeley's cottage, and so he took this round ; but presently, to his great surprise and delight, in the field-path which skirted the woods, he came upon Doris. So pleased was he to see her just then, that he could not show

very much vexation when she told him that she had little Willy with her, but that he had climbed over into the wood to look for primroses.

"Leave him there," said the old lawyer, promptly. "Why don't you get Scot Monkton to go strolling about with you, or why don't you ride with him, or tempt him to soften his brain over croquet, or—anything? You would, if you were his true friend."

"Mr. Bradford," interposed Doris, a crimson wave rushing over her face "I do try indeed—indeed I do; but you have no idea how impossible it is. He never will come; and yet he isn't cold or discourteous; he is just as he always was. I—I bring Willy, because he will come to the Dower House to fetch him; and—and that way only can I win him."

"My dear," said the old man, touching her cheek with tenderness, as the vivid colour faded, "I see. I didn't mean to be so hasty. I ought to know by this time how to trust to a woman's wit where tenderness is needed. I came round here to take Wakeley's cottage on my way to the Dower House; and now I'm very glad I came."

"And I am very glad I met you. I want to ask you something, please."

"A hundred things, if you like, my dear; I came prepared to hear something from you. Begin at the beginning."

"Did Mr. Monkton ever tell you," asked Doris, standing earnestly before the old lawyer, while he waited in the path, "that he had once, just six weeks ago, been warned to—to—about any danger threatening him, from anyone in the Green Pits, in the night?"

"What do you mean? Don't speak like a stammering school-girl. It's as easy to say a thing out straightforwardly as to bungle over hints. Now then, what was it?"

"Did he tell you," said Doris, trembling so much as she spoke, that the old man laid his firm hand on her shoulder, "how I warned him one night that he must watch his stack-yard through the darkness?"

"Tell? Not he!" cried Mr. Bradford, angrily. "I thoroughly believe the man is mad!"

"He did not tell?" questioned Doris, wondering.

"No; being the wisest thing he could have done, of course he didn't do it."

"Perhaps," said Doris, her raised face very

wistful, "he thought, as it turned out a false alarm, there was no meaning in it at all; and perhaps he remembered that I said I had promised; and—and he respects that promise. But I have thought, Mr. Bradford, and thought; and—it seems to me more right to tell."

"The promise was wrung from you on some wise plea, I daresay, my dear," observed the old lawyer, kindly; "but you are right now to break it, if it can help us to track a scoundrel, and prove the honour of an honourable man. Well, who won the promise from you—Anna Wakeley, was it?"

The blunt question was a great help to Doris, and in a few minutes Mr. Bradford knew all she wished to tell, of that scene between herself and Anna Wakeley. He made no comment upon it when she finished; but, with a cheery call and whistle, he summoned Willy from the woods, and, slipping Doris's hand through his arm, walked down the slope, chatting with them both, just as if his thoughts were not busy and engrossed.

When they reached the row of poplars behind Wakeley's cottage, Doris turned aside with her little charge, while Mr. Bradford walked through

the wicket gate ; and, when Anna answered his prompt rap upon the door, he entered the kitchen without hesitation.

If he had felt that what he wished to say to her had needed a way paved for it, he would have left this errand for Monsieur Raine, or for Doris herself, to fulfil. But the decision upon which he had been acting when he met Doris—to look in and hear Anna's account of her husband—was strengthened now by what he had heard, and he had too deeply rooted a confidence in himself, to fear saying any more than he need—even if he spoke, now that suspicion was so thoroughly roused—or to betray any motive in his visit if he should chance to find Wakeley at home.

Watching her keenly, while he told her with unmistakable distinctness what he had heard, he could plainly see what Anna must have suffered before her nerves could have become thus thoroughly unstrung. So his voice gradually lost its hardness, and, when he felt his errand over, it was almost gently that he repeated the words which, when he had first uttered them, had brought that fit of trembling which she could not stay.

"You have it in your power, you see, to clear the Squire's name entirely."

"But Oliver!" she cried, when her fear found voice at last. "Oliver would——"

"Oliver should do nothing to harm you; I will promise that," said the lawyer, solemnly.

"But you forget," she opposed, with an eager interrogation in her tone, "all I do is useless—useless in sparing Mr. Monkton, useless in——"

"All you do shall be made most useful in sparing Mr. Monkton," returned Mr. Bradford, quietly and kindly passing over the other words as if he had not heard them. "I shall make it useful."

"But—if Oliver——"

"Just at present," said the old lawyer, in his cool tone of business, "we have to remove this vile suspicion from the Squire, as far as each of us can. You have your share to do, and you must do it. Why should you fear your husband? Is your life in——"

"Life!"—she echoed with an involuntary cry. "Do you think life is so easy and so happy for me, that I would do a wrong to keep it? Life! No, that could hardly be a precious thing for me to hold, for its own sake. But, if Oliver, in

his anger—— Do you ever," she questioned, breaking off her sentence, and whispering the words through her teeth; "could you ever dream what it was to live with a phantom following every step—a ghastly phantom whispering in your ear just one word—always the same word—'Murder'? And we are husband and wife—one of God's own ministers made us so long ago—how many years ago?"

"Hush!" said the old lawyer, compassionately. "You are a young woman yet; and I daresay there is a long and pleasant life in store for you."

"For me!" echoed Anna, wearily. "Impossible! You see—you see," she said, her white lips framing the words with difficulty, "I can do nothing. I am helpless in this. Oliver always said so."

"You know now what you can do, and what it is your simple duty to do. While you do your duty," the old lawyer added, gravely, "you may leave the rest to God!"

She covered her face as he spoke, and had not lifted it again when, after telling her he would leave her to think of her first step, he quietly left the cottage.

"Poor thing!" he muttered to himself, as he went slowly on into the park. "Can she ever outlive, and forget, what this scoundrel has made her bear? Husband and wife! And we think there is no greater sorrow than to lose those we love by—death. How blind we are!"

Mr. Bradford had another errand to fulfil before he gave himself rest; and, when he had left the park, and turned into the high-road, he walked on, steadily and swiftly towards Comely Place. When he was within about half a mile of the house, a pony-carriage passed him at a rapid pace, and then stopped. Its occupant, Miss Levey, looking back, and pretending to recognize him with surprise only at that moment, drew in her ponies, and offered her hand.

"Let me drive you, Mr. Bradford—do," she said, with her ready smile, as the tiny groom went to the ponies' heads.

An uncommon grimness fell upon the old man's face. He was walking for his own pleasure, he told her, and then thanked her, and stood back.

"It is quite a relief to see you," she said; "we cannot help having such confidence in you."

You can scarcely guess how thoroughly we all depend upon you to restore Mr. Monkton to his old place and his old spirit."

"An impossible restoration, Miss Levey."

"Oh, Mr. Bradford, why?"

"Because he has never lost either his old place or his old spirit."

"I see what you mean," said Rose, looking down with an appearance of deep thought. "But still I am sure you must understand me too; you will bring him safely through this wicked trial, won't you?"

"Certainly—to please you."

"Oh! I wish," she exclaimed, ecstatically, before she had even comprehended this reply, "I could help in this, Mr. Bradford. Do tell me one thing—I have such confidence in your opinion, and I am so anxious—will it—will it be a very expensive process to ensure Mr. Monkton's acquittal?"

"Very. I once knew a lawyer value his services as high as six-and-eightpence!"

"Oh! Mr. Bradford," cried Rose—even *she* aware now of having blundered awkwardly—"you have quite mistaken me; indeed I was not thinking of *you* in any light beyond Mr.

Monkton's particular friend, and the one person on whom we all entirely depend to prove his innocence. Please understand that, because I want to ask you a great favour."

"Always think twice before you ask a favour, Miss Levey," interposed Mr. Bradford, his coolness successfully concealing his surprise.

"I have thought twice—I have thought a hundred times," she returned, leaning nearer to him, and flushing unusually in her nervous eagerness. "I have a large fortune, Mr. Bradford, and I should be so happy if, by the help of any part of it, I could free him."

Mr. Bradford waited for her last word, and then he raised his hat as he answered her.

"The law will free him, Miss Levey—that's the divinity that shapes our ends. Don't let me detain you."

"It seems to me," muttered Rose to herself, as she drove on, "that that old man is jealous." And then her angry thoughts went back to the last time she had made this offer of her fortune for Scot Monkton, and she recalled with burning cheeks the few courteous words of his written reply. But the narrow nature, working so piti-

fully for its own ends, had not learnt its lesson yet.

No further thought did old Mr. Bradford waste upon this interview; he indulged only in a meditative observation as the phaeton rolled out of sight—

"I forget which is which, but I think that must be Susannah. It's a long name, and she's a long person!"

With as much coolness as if he were a constant visitor at Comely Place, did the lawyer walk up to the door, and pull the heavy handle of the bell which hung beside it. But, when a grave, white-haired servant-man opened to him, he asked for Miss Chamberlain with a note of real anxiety in his voice.

"Miss Chamberlain," the servant said, when he returned to the room where he had left Mr. Bradford while he bore his message, "begs to be kindly excused, as she is not very well."

"Let me trouble you to go once more," urged Mr. Bradford, "and carry her this."

He wrote a few lines and folded the paper, and sealed it at a writing-table near; and then, while it was carried to Margaret, he waited placidly.

When the man returned, to say that Miss Chamberlain would see Mr. Bradford in a few minutes, the lawyer fancied that this message had surprised even the servant himself.

"Curious," he thought; but again quite placidly he waited.

When, after his interview with Margaret, Mr. Bradford crossed the hall on his way out, the old servant glanced in surprise at the clock. This visitor had been with Miss Chamberlain almost two hours.

But Mr. Bradford's eyes never wandered near the clock. Seeming quite unaware how long he had stayed, he passed the threshold very slowly, his face full of a grave, new trouble.

CHAPTER XI.

MUCH to the surprise of Doris, Mr. Bradford did not appear at the Dower House that evening until it was time for him to drive into Minton to catch the mail. Scot Monkton had walked up with him from the Black Birches to take Willy home, and they waited only while the horses were put to for Mr. Bradford, and while Doris wrapped the child in a plaid of her own.

"Because, if you take care of yourself, you know," she said, looking merrily down upon the little muffled figure, "your cough will soon go."

"Where?" asked the child, in his slow, wistful way. "To another little boy?"

Doris, with puckered eyebrows, glanced up into Scot's face as he stood near her.

"Perhaps it is as tired of little boys," he said, lightly, "as we little boys are tired of it. Suppose we try to drop it where no little boys are idling about."

"In the woods?" questioned Willy, looking anxiously from Scot to Doris. "Would it hurt the flowers?"

"I never yet heard a blue-bell coughing, or noticed a buttercup gasping with croup, but no doubt they do catch cold, from constantly standing in a draught. Evidently, Miss Egerton, Willy has had a pleasant time in the woods to-day."

"Couldn't we," pondered the child, looking up at Scot with great seriousness, "leave the cough in the empty house? It is so big, and there are no little boys."

Doris, under pretence of tightening his plaid, bent till her face was hidden from Scot. But, while he noticed this, he only said—

"So Miss Egerton took you to the empty house, did she, Willy?"

"Not inside," the child answered, with a slow shake of his head. "She didn't know what it was like inside; she didn't, more'n me," he added, touching her shyly; "did you?"

"No."

"You would not care for the trouble, Miss Egerton, or I'm sure Colonel Egerton would take you."

"I would rather——" She stopped abruptly in her reply, and changed its tone. "I will go when Willy goes," she said, imagining that that thought dismissed the matter cheerily.

"And you said you'd like to go," observed Willy, his eyes questioning her solemnly, "didn't you?"

"If you really care to go, Miss Egerton, will you come with Willy, and—with me?"

"I should like it so much."

In her simple desire to win him from his constant work and the thought of the coming trial, she assented readily, and even eagerly. For a few hours his hands and thoughts would relax from their great strain; for a few hours he would loiter in rooms and scenes which were beautiful and familiar to him. Her eyes grew bright at the thought. She had done not only what her heart dictated, but what both her father and Mr. Bradford had urged her to do.

"When shall we go?" she asked, with the eagerness of a child. "To-morrow?"

In a few minutes it was arranged, and, though Miss Bradford merrily withdrew from the plan, Scot said he would urge Miss Windish to go with them.

But next morning, when at the appointed time Doris stood at the gate to join them, Scot came up to her, with the child only.

"Aunt Michal could not come," he said, as he offered Doris his hand. "Shall you postpone the walk, Miss Egerton?"

"Why?" she asked, surprised. "Do you find you cannot spare us the time?"

"A probable discovery indeed!"

So they turned and walked on together, side by side, while the child, always near Scot, seemed lost in a happy little world of his own, bounded only by the sunshine. Doris felt her breath quicken as they came into the shadow of the house, and suddenly a doubt visited her of which she had not thought before. Had it been cruel, after all, instead of kind, to tempt Scot here, where memories would hover in crowds about the old familiar rooms?

With a vague fear of this, she looked anxiously into his face as she passed him in the wide entrance. So many had said it would be

well to tempt Scot to Kingswood—could they all have been wrong?

“Do you feel afraid, Miss Egerton,” he asked, just because he understood this thought, “in consequence of there being no *osmunda* over the door?”

Doris laughed in her great relief.

“There is a better earnest of good luck even than the *osmunda*,” she said.

“But it is given to passing *through* the doors, instead of pausing over them, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I think so,” responded Doris, brightly. “It will pass through the door—as we have done to-day—but it will stay here for ever.”

“It will pass through the door as you have done to-day,” said Scot, coolly altering her phrase. “There are bright days in store for Kingswood, then.”

They lingered in the hall, while the woman who had opened the door to them, went into the chief rooms to let in the daylight; and then they began their tour, chatting in a merry, unconnected way, and greatly enjoying the boundless astonishment which little Willy found it at last impossible to suppress.

“It’s so beautiful!” he whispered, hiding his face in Doris’s dress, when they entered the

picture-gallery. "Did — did father see it, please?"

"Willy," said Scot, lifting the child pitifully in his arms, and turning to the window, "look out here, dear. Those pictures are too many to see at once; but here is the best picture of all, and your father loved it dearly, of course — all men do."

As the child stood on the window-seat, trying to stay his quiet sobs, while Scot held him, Doris sat down beside him, and began to talk of the wide, beautiful view of wood and park and river, leaving the little fellow to recover himself. Then she slipped quietly away, and wandered down the gallery alone; and Scot, though he looked after her, only held the child a little closer, and smiled kindly and warmly into the moist eyes which sought his so trustfully. He saw that Doris wished him to feel as utterly free as if she were not there; and he understood her motive, as he understood all kind and generous impulses. And, when Doris came back soon to talk of the pictures she had seen, he discussed them just with his old ease.

"Of course there are many portraits I have

recognised, even so far," said Doris, comfortably ensconced in her corner of the cushioned seat. "But, Mr. Monkton, what a curious painting that is of an old gentleman in a sort of yellow satin suit — a Court dress of the time, I suppose,—writing on a long sheet of paper, with 'Last Will and Testament of Piers Monkton' on the top."

"Yes—a curious specimen of portraiture," laughed Scot, "as the original was a curious specimen of squirearchy. That old ancestor of mine chose to be painted so, because he had great crotchets on the subject of wills. I believe he tried to introduce an Act of Parliament to prevent property descending, even from father to son, without a will. He said every rich man should be made to feel the responsibility of apportioning his property, and that, if he would not, he deserved to lose it."

"But isn't it unnecessary in many cases?"

"He didn't think so."

"And have his descendants all agreed with him?"

As soon as ever the question was asked, Doris would have given much to recall it. She remembered Kenneth telling her that the late

Squire had left no will; and though she remembered, too, how he had said it could not signify, as Mr. Monkton left an only son; still she saw that her unthinking words had given pain.

"Of course," she went on, nervously, "a will cannot be necessary where the property descends from a father to an only son; but perhaps he—your ancestor—thought everyone ought to leave a legacy of some kind; and I suppose one cannot leave a legacy without a will, Mr. Monkton."

What was that look in Scot's face which, though she could not comprehend it, gave her such a pain to see? Had she made a blunder? Could a legacy be made without a will? And could there be the memory of such a legacy to bring that sad look for a moment upon the steadfast, handsome face? Only for a moment, though, for, as she saw it, he turned her question aside with a gay remark which, though not irrelevant, changed the subject skilfully.

Then the child put in his slow, quiet question.

"*Will!*" he said. "Father called me Will sometimes. Is there another Will—please?"

"Though at present only a very small old gentleman," replied Scot, looking quizzically up at the sober little figure standing on the seat between himself and Doris, "there may come a time when you will be a great man, and rich too—which may be all one with the greatness, or may be quite a separate thing—and then you will get somebody to write on a paper for you who is to have all your money and treasures."

"The top you bought me?"

"Certainly. You will say—'I give my top to So-and-so.'"

"Who's soneso?" inquired Willy, thoughtfully.

"The boy of the future, dear, to whom you bequeath your property in tops."

"No, please," said the child, with his shy, timid touch upon Scot's arm, "I shall give it to you."

"By that time, my dear little fellow," remarked Scot, as he lifted the child to the ground, "the top will be as superannuated an article as myself. But it will be time enough to think about your will when you are rich. Now go and see the pictures."

"How he loves you, Mr. Monkton!" said

Doris, rising when she saw that, though the boy obeyed in an instant, he longed to remain near Scot. "And he seems to have a great power of loving."

"You judge by comparison," Scot observed, as he strolled on at her side. "Most little fellows—like most big ones—have many to love, or one very near to them on whom it is natural and legitimate to lavish all the affection they possess; but some have only just such a friend as I am to the child, or—the child is to me."

"How very beautiful this gallery is, Mr. Monkton!" said Doris, hurriedly. "It looks as long as the Larch Walk. How thoroughly at home you must feel among the old faces!"

"What's that cheerful idea, Miss Egerton, about 'old faces glimmering through the doors?' 'Old faces glistening in their frames' would be a truer reading, don't you think?"

"No," replied Doris, quietly. "You are speaking of the *house* apart from *home*."

"And why not? Is it home to any one of us?"

"Yes," said Doris, with gentle firmness. "It must still be home to you, and will be."

"And you think I really see 'old faces glimmering through the doors,' and hear 'old footsteps treading the upper floors,' and 'old voices calling me'?"

"Yes."

"Very well; I see them then, *and* hear them," said Scot, composedly, as Doris suddenly paused, her eyes fixed upon his own portrait, "and you are to blame, Miss Egerton, that I fail to-day—like a coward—in seeing this house only as any other vacant, chilly, echoing, gigantic mass of stonework,"

"I am willing that it shall be my fault," returned Doris, softly, but in great earnestness; "you came here to oblige me, though I was an utter stranger to this house and to your old life; but, Mr. Monkton, in your other life—and even this portrait would show me how little you are changed, if I could not remember it myself—have you thought of me so little as a friend that you should care to *act* indifference before me?"

"Through that 'other life' you speak of, you have been the——" Scot broke off, and finished the sentence very quietly in his suppressed emotion. "No pleasanter friendship

could a man wish than yours, Miss Egerton."

"Thank you," she returned, simply. "Then you will think of me as a real friend always?"

"In what other way could I possibly think of you?"

She smiled because he had a smile upon his lips; for the pictured face above, with its clear, straightforward gaze, betrayed no more token of a brave, unflinching struggle than did the living, guarded face beside her.

Now and then they sat to rest upon one of the couches; and now and then Scot lifted the child to tell him—or to listen while Doris told him—the story of one of the statues or pictures; but there came no shadow between them again, however fleeting, and, when Scot said once that the gallery had never before seemed so small, there was a meaning in the words which even he himself did not fully comprehend. Of all the rooms in Kingswood this had been—though the most beautiful—the least homelike. So frequently open to visitors, as it had always been, the circumstance of its being private to the household only on certain days, prevented its ever seeming entirely so. Therefore what could have given it to-day the homelike feeling?

"There's Miss Michal!" cried Doris, as they paused before that colourless painting of the girl in white, of which Philippe Sourdét had feigned admiration when he had visited the gallery a year before.

"I remember that on the very day she returned——" began Scot, and then stopped abruptly—not because he either lost or shrank from the memory, but interrupted by a faltering cry from Willy's lips—

"Father! Oh! it's father!"

The child was trembling pitifully, as he stood with his eyes fixed upon one of the portraits, and his folded hands lifted to it.

"It's father! It is—it is, indeed! Oh! —father!"

Again, as on the day when Scot had taken that father's place, and given the homeless child a home, the love and longing were too great for the frail little form, and once more came the rest of total unconsciousness within Scot's arms.

"How vividly," said Doris, half an hour afterwards, when they had left the house, and were walking slowly homewards through the park—Willy on Mr. Monkton's shoulder, quite restor-

ed, and scarcely paler or more quiet than his wont—"that picture must have reminded him of his father! Whose portrait was it, Mr. Monkton?"

"That of my father's brother. He was a Scot Monkton too. Miss Egerton, how tenderly and how cleverly you brought my little fellow back to life! I wish the thanks of either of us were worth having."

"It is plain to me, then, that *my* thanks are worthless," said Doris, laughing; "else I would thank you for one of the pleasantest mornings I have spent for long."

They stood to part at the gate of the Dower House—for Scot would not be persuaded to stay—and he took the child from his shoulders to receive Doris's kiss, watching how long she made it, and how gentle, while the boy laid his cheek to hers with a shy caress. Then Scot and Willy walked on together through the park—where the willow-buds unfolded, soft and green in their Spring childhood; and where on the knotted branches of the oaks some withered leaves still hung and hid their glorious Summer promise.

"Ah! Aunt Michal, there you are; and here are we."

It was just the pleasant greeting to which Miss Michal was accustomed, but, when it reached her from the garden gate, to which her back was turned, she sprang up with a faint shriek.

"You startled me so," she said, reproachfully, as Scot came up to her. "Everything startles me now; I never know what may not have happened. No, give me back the rake, Scot; I want to smooth this soil a little. Certainly I've no flowers to put in when it's ready—of course not—but I would rather get it ready all the same, Scot, and there's no room in the house for me and all those strangers."

"Who are they now?"

"*They!*" echoed Miss Michal, with melancholy contempt. "I didn't say 'they.' Isn't one sufficient?"

"It depends; come in and let us see, Aunt Michal."

But, in her resolute depression, Miss Michal refused to run the risk of this visitor being what she termed "another disguise." So Scot entered the house alone, and courteously returned the salutation of the young man who waited for him—a slight, gentlemanly young fellow, whose manners were so quiet, and even inert,

that Scot looked at him in scarcely-concealed surprise, when he had read the letter he bore from Mr. Bradford. But, as Scot looked, the young man met his eyes, and smiled.

"Mr. Bradford speaks kindly, in his letter, of my ability for this trust, Mr. Monkton, and you doubt it. I see those two facts clearly."

"I did not doubt," said Scot, amused. "I only wondered, because he writes that you are well up in everything here—in all the news, and gossip, and suspicion of the neighbourhood; and you looked just then so very unlike it."

"Thank you, sir," returned the young man, with a bow. "I am a pretty competent groom, but unfortunately don't possess an idea beyond ponies—Lewis Raine, at your service."

"As I am inclined to believe all that my old friend says of you in this letter," responded Scot, in his warm, pleasant way, "I place myself at your service too."

"No need, sir," Raine said, quickly, for he saw that Mr. Monkton expected a category of questions. "I must go on to the Dower House with Miss Egerton's pony. Strange to say, he lost a shoe on the journey, so I shall take him

round to the forge this evening. Which is the busiest about here, sir?"

"The busiest?" repeated Scot; and then in a moment the man's meaning flashed upon him. "The favourite forge," he said, composedly, "is in the centre of the village."

Raine had not intended to throw out any further hints as to where the people congregated, but even if he had, he would have changed the intention. It was not from Mr. Monkton he would seek this kind of information. Though not appearing at all observant, he was still studying Scot's face, when, after a casual glance from the window, he asked if that was the little boy who was to learn to ride.

"Yes; I daresay Mr. Bradford has told you all about him," said Scot, as he went to the window, and Willy ran in at his call; "but he has been so moved to-day by a chance likeness, that presently I must get Mr. Bradford to enlist your help in trying to trace his parentage. However difficult, as long as there is a possibility——"

Willy had entered now, and, on his way across the room to Scot, had stopped opposite

Raine, gazing at him in grave and troubled perplexity.

"I—I know you," said the child, closing his eyes in a curious and plaintive effort to recall something. "You used to speak to me, and be kind; and I heard you sing. I stood outside the door, and you took me in, and I got warm. That was you, wasn't it?" he asked, with a touching earnestness.

"Grand achievements for anyone possessing a spark of humanity," Raine answered, smiling as he bent to look into the child's face; "but, upon their merits, will you shake hands, old friend? I will be a better friend now, for I will teach you to ride."

"No, thank you," declined the child, in his solemn, old-fashioned politeness, as he drew back to Scot's side. "I don't want to, thank you."

"And, when you quite know how to manage a pony," continued Scot, appearing not to notice his courteous dissent, "you shall ride with me. I am so glad that Mr. Raine will teach you. Now run back into the garden. Stay—I will put you through the window here."

He had felt it such a stern duty to discourage

the child from clinging to him, and to induce him to attach himself to the new groom, that he was glad of this opportunity to put his kind arms about the trembling little figure, even for that moment.

"He is a delicate little fellow still, just as he always was," said Raine, when Mr. Monkton turned to him for information; "and, more than that, he has still the very grave and elderly manners which always amused me, though there is something touching in them too. Poor child! I believe his life has been one long perplexity to him."

"Did you know his father?" asked Scot, recalling vividly that night when he took Willy home.

"No, I never saw his father. The fact is, Mr. Monkton, I know very little about the child himself. His mother—who was a music-hall singer, of very second-rate power—once lodged in a room over the one I occupy, and, when she first came, she brought that child with her. He led a lonely life there for a week or two, for his mother was always out, or had a number of noisy people with her at home; and it was during those weeks that little Willy

would creep to my door to hear me sing, or to win a few words quietly to himself, as I believe he never won them from his mother. I had very seldom time—and, to own the truth, I had very seldom inclination—to notice him; but I should have tried, if I had guessed how he would remember such a trifle of kindness, especially as he was always so grateful for a kind word that I was ashamed of his thanks.”

“Did you hear nothing of his father?”

“I heard his wife’s account,” Raine answered with a slight laugh of contempt. “If you care for that, sir, I may tell you he was one with whom nothing ever prospered, and to whom it was very unfortunate for a wife to be tied. If I gave my own opinion, I should say it was quite enough to blight any man’s life to be bound to such a wife—or, rather, I should say, to possess no better a wife and mother for his boy. As for that woman feeling *bound* to him, why, she never did!”

“And the father fetched his child away?”

“Yes; and she continued the same kind of life until she passed from my knowledge.”

“Do you mind telling me how?”

“In the simplest way in the world, Mr. Monk-

ton, and the most natural for such a woman. One day, when she was as deeply in debt as she dared to go, she forgot to return to her lodgings, or to the neighbourhood of tradesmen who had trusted her. They told me she must have carried off all she valued by instalments, for the box she left behind—as a blind—contained nothing but worn-out stage-dresses and old song-books, except a sealed packet addressed to her husband. Probably she fancied the mistress of the house would do what she really did—send to this address, to offer the parcel in exchange for the payment of the wife's debt. But the man could not be found, and the packet remains unopened still—so I presume. If you wish to identify the child, sir, of course these papers may be valuable.”

“We will try at once,” said Scot, in his prompt, cool way. “This is what I propose—”

Upon what he proposed Mr. Raine could suggest no improvement, and the consequence of their decision was the detective's return to London, the examination by himself and Mr. Bradford of the contents of that parcel detained at the lodging-house, and his return next evening with a letter from Mr. Bradford to Scot,

which he left at the Black Birches only in passing.

When Scot began to break Mr. Bradford's seal, his fingers shook a little, and he stopped in surprise, and laughed to see it; while Miss Michal—who sat opposite in a state of petulant suspense—remarked that, as his hand had never trembled all through his own troubles, she failed to see any legitimate cause why it should shake over that child's—for no former experience had taught Miss Michal that a moment of sudden hope or keen suspense will shake a firmness which sorrow cannot stir.

"Scot, my dear, what does it say? It can't be anything so—so very important."

The little lady had borne her silence for four long minutes, and the mild protest of course was called for.

Scot raised his face (a thoughtful face, but was it not ever thoughtful now?) and its gladness was beyond words.

"This is what Bradford says, Aunt Michal. It is laconic, and like him. 'I went to Raine's lodgings with him, procured the parcel he mentioned to you, and found out all you wished to know. If you are content, all the better. I am

not. The child is, beyond doubt, the son of Sophie Sourdets son, and therefore the grandson of your uncle Scot Monkton. If we had not proved the marriage in San Remo, I would never have touched these papers. Now they are valuable proofs, and I hold them at your will. There are about a dozen letters from Sophie Sourdets to her husband, addressed to Robert Scot, a few leaves of the old diary we have in Philippe Sourdets case, and a duplicate photograph. They are evidently the tokens left at the Foundling by the woman calling herself Sophie Scot. In fact, what I hold establishes the child's claim to his name—you will not get T. & C. Bradford to acknowledge, on paper, his claim to more. I shall run down soon, and in the meantime Raine, I am sure, will make good use of every moment."

"Then—then," faltered Miss Michal, through profuse tears, "this child—is—is—a Monkton!"

"Yes, poor little fellow; and right can be done at last."

"And you—you, Scot," gasped Miss Michal, every word growing more feeble, "will give up the Kingswood property to—to such a baby?"

"So gladly, Aunt Michal."

"Gladly! You must be mad. I'm—I'm going up to the child now," she added, presently, all in the same tone, "instead of you, Scot. I daresay he'll be asleep and all right, and it will be only a wasted journey for either of us; but you are tired; and—oh! Scot, that you should give up to *him*!" And Miss Michal ended with a renewed burst of tears.

"Do you notice?" asked Scot, rousing himself from his long thought, "how strangely the thing has worked, Aunt Michal? After searching far and wide for the heir of Kingswood, he is found here upon our own hearth."

"That's always the way," rejoined Miss Michal, briskly, through her tears. "As soon as ever I've hunted for the keys in every room up to the attic, there they are at the bottom of my pocket. Scot" (Miss Michal had turned back from the door, and her eyes, in their astonished roundness, were growing dry without her knowledge), "I'm relieved about one thing. It always *did* hurt me so to feel that that little bed should have been bought for a child that didn't belong to us—such a real bargain as it was! And, Scot, to think that it was just your kindness and compassion for—

for a desolate child—that solved the great difficulty after all. I feel, Scot——”

“So glad about the bed, Aunt Michal? So do I. It is the cheapest bed I ever saw.”

CHAPTER XII.

IT was not long before the new groom at the Dower House had made friends, not only of his fellow-servants, but of the servants of the neighbouring families; and not only of the villagers, but of many of the Minton people too. With a marvellous rapidity he had installed himself in the unenviable position of general favourite. There was a winning frankness in his easy ways which was irresistible to the sober country people; a confidential sociableness in his manners which made him welcome to the quiet gossips; a convivial *bonhomie* which made his presence a boon in the tavern bar, or the village public-house; and a rollicking, muscular argumentativeness which caused him to be thoroughly appreciated in the noisy parliament round the forge. And, beyond this, he made such a masterly use of flattery, and

had so much suavity in his gallant, half foreign ways, that the village girls made purposeless errands that they might fall in his way, and the maid-servants at the Dower House treasured every one of his merry compliments.

Once or twice the remark was hazarded that Miss Egerton's new groom seemed to have rather an unusual amount of leisure on his hands, but there were always voices ready to excuse this fact.

"Lewis couldn't make his post at the Dower House harder than it was, and, if Lloyd *would* persist in keeping his own work in his own hands, why, it wasn't Lewis's fault. He was so quick too—not one to make an hour's work last a day, as some were."

Then they would lead him off in triumph to the "Monkton Arms," or the "White Horse," and wait for his opinion on national questions; while they knew it was only his French politeness which allowed him to undergo so patiently uninteresting items of local gossip, clamorous arguments on the approaching trial, or—worse than all—the vindictive prognostications of Oliver Wakeley as to its result.

But Mr. Lewis betrayed no weariness even

on these topics; and, while his admiring companions were sure that Wakeley's surly invective or maudlin patronage was most distasteful to him, Wakeley himself felt that he and the new groom were kindred spirits, and that it was real sympathy with his sentiments which prompted Mr. Lewis to treat him occasionally to his favourite beverage.

Ever after that first visit of his to Anna Wakeley—when she had been terrified by the strange face, as he walked up the garden, leading the pony with Willy on it—he had been a welcome visitor to the cottage. On that first day he had come only to return the lantern she had lent Doris (and had even been so absent-minded as to carry it away again with him); but still he had had such a long, quiet, pleasant talk with the solitary woman, that Anna, in all her shrinking nervousness, had grown to look forward to that little daily talk with Lewis when he stopped the pony at the cottage on the slope.

So, equally into every group he carried some indefinable charm which made him ever welcome. No one quite understood what it was—no one afterwards remembered what it could

have been. True, he was brisk and cheerful, but then, he had had rather an idle way about him too, they remembered when they came to think of it. He was a good listener (a very good listener) but then he had often kept them talking to him when he might have given them a song, which was disobliging they considered—when they came to think of it. He was a witty talker (witty and versatile enough) but then they remembered that he had more than once turned off a good story into some stupid bet with Wakeley or his associates—when they came to think of it. He had the very pleasantest air of being confidential, but then they could remember no spicy item of scandal which he had ever given them—when they came to think of it. But then they never did “come to think of it” until after that trial was over, and their eyes had all been opened to the fact that he had been amongst them in disguise.

And in the meantime he was at home and popular everywhere; and perhaps the most wonderful proof of his influence was the fact that the other men-servants were not jealous of him. Only once had Lloyd been tempted to complain to his mistress that something “was

Lewis's fault," and even then he would gladly, if he could, have recalled the words as soon as they were uttered, because "Lewis was such a good-hearted fellow, and never would have grumbled at him."

"I will speak to Lewis," Doris had said, feigning annoyance with him. Of course, if he is neglectful, Colonel Egerton will dismiss him—next month."

And Colonel Egerton, who had heard, laughed heartily over the speech.

"Not bad," he said, overtaking her as she walked away in her dignity; "not bad, considering Raine's work will be over—next month. I never saw such a fellow as he is," he added, laughing; "I have actually just seen him go to Comely Place. He has managed to make a friend even of that old major-domo of Chamberlain's, by far the most unapproachable fellow in the county; a man with a secret, I firmly believe, yet Raine has found some vulnerable point. Even at Osborne House—but I declare I get utterly lost in admiration when I try to grasp all his friendships. He is thoroughly at home, even in Stanley Monkton's hotel at Minton. If

Stanley did but know to whose *surveillance* he is subject!"

This *surveillance* of Raine's, hidden so well under his ready sympathy and gay *insouciance*, never slackened until he donned his groom's livery for the last time, and returned to London on the evening of the Saturday on which the Minton assizes opened. Scot Monkton's trial was fixed for hearing on Monday morning at ten o'clock, and up to the afternoon of Saturday Mr. Bradford had not arrived. Kenneth was not anxious, for his father had sent word by him that no one need "expect him till they saw him," but Doris longed for her old friend, whose unlimited and immovable confidence in the law would have done so much to lighten the weight of doubt and anxiety which—however deep her trust in its final issue—necessarily hung over the approaching trial. But Doris had an added source of anxiety, from which none of Mr. Bradford's coolness and confidence could have relieved her, for she knew that he must share it too, and bear it through all the mental labour of his profession. This was the pain of seeing how Kenneth was worn by his intense, suppressed excitement. The 17th of April was

the date fixed for the first representation of his drama; and, though he seemed to have set all thought of it aside just now, in his deep sympathy with Scot Monkton, still Doris could detect how the strong wave of constant thought was undermining health and youth.

"Kenneth, you don't forget that, even if your drama fails—which it cannot—the fact will not change our promise to each other."

It was Sunday afternoon, and they were walking through the park to church. Kenneth—revelling in the calm and beauty of the scene—had been speaking of what such peace and quiet would be to those whose brains had grown dazed and weary over their work in the ceaseless din of a London street.

"If I succeed," he had said, with solemn earnestness, "I shall try to win one of them now and then to such a rest as this. But if I fail——" And then Doris had brightly asked him that question, "You don't forget that, even if your drama fails—which it cannot—the fact will not change our promise to each other?"

"Are you quite sure, my darling," Kenneth asked, most quietly, "that you think I shall succeed?"

"I never doubted it for one moment, Ken," she said, a little surprised. "I never have, and—I cannot."

"Oh, my love, say it to me now, while it will sound so sweet! You *are* my promised wife?"

"I have been so, Kenneth, ever since I spent my last holiday at Richmond."

"When we read *Antigone* aloud together."

"Yes."

"And you told Mr. Monkton about it. You saw him that day for the first time. How well I remember it all! Sometimes, Doris, I fancy I remember every word you ever said to me."

"Not a bad fancy, Kenneth, considering you are *only* a poet. There's the bell! I'm glad we are here before anyone else."

"I am glad too," said Kenneth, as they turned aside. "I hardly knew how I loved this little churchyard, Doris, until one day I dreamed—I suppose I had fallen asleep over my writing, for it was a real dream—that I was resting here upon the grass, lying with my hand in yours, dear, and looking up beyond the elms into the wide, calm blue above. I can recall so vividly what a rest it felt! Doris, I'm sure that

only those whose brains have grown weary in the city can fully understand what such a rest would be. I have thought—ever since that dream I have thought—that I should like my own grave here.”

“And mine, then, of course,” supplemented Doris, tenderly. “But, after all, Kenneth, it is only *now* that we mind, is it? It will be all one to us then. We shall have found a peace which could not be disturbed by the sounds which always weary you. It is now that you should rest. Dear Ken, I wish I could persuade you how much better is such peace as you feel to-day, than the constant struggle—But,” she added, brightly, when she saw his face sadden, “you know best, Ken. It is your choice, and you are happier so.”

“My choice?” he echoed, dreamily. “I hardly know, Doris. Sometimes I feel that I have been led by something stronger than choice.”

“Power to succeed you mean,” she smiled. “Now shall we go into church?”

This was the first time during his visit that Kenneth had referred to his own prospects, for he had come determined to interest Doris on

pleasant general subjects, without touching either on Mr. Monkton's approaching trial, or his own coming test. So, in the quiet pause before the service, he blamed himself for his forgetfulness, and again formed his resolutions, forgetting how impossible it was to deny himself the sympathy which was so precious to him, and that bright response to the love which was more deep and steadfast even than the love he gave his art.

Miss Windish and little Willy sat with them in the great Kingswood pew, but the service went on to its close, and Scot Monkton did not appear.

"I thought he would be here," sighed Miss Michal, when they stood together at the churchyard gate.

The congregation had all dispersed—even Mr. Herries, after his chat with them, had passed on to the Vicarage—but still they seemed in no haste to separate. Presently the child, looking wistfully to the woods, gave a start, and, when Miss Michal discovered that it was Scot he saw, she released his hand, and told him he might run. Needing no other word, he raced towards Scot, and Miss Michal took up the skirt of her dress.

"Now that Scot is coming," she said, "we may as well go. He has been away since breakfast; and I didn't know where he might have gone, especially as he wouldn't take even little Willy. But we'll go now. This evening will be so dismal that I wanted to stay out as long as possible."

Doris smiled. She knew how cleverly her father had laid his plans to circumvent Miss Michal and Scot spending their evening alone, and so she and Kenneth—just as if they did it unthinkingly—sauntered on with the little lady towards the Black Birches—very slowly, that Scot might soon overtake them. He came up to them with no weariness or loitering in his firm, light step; and his words were prompt and pleasant as of old. He spoke to Doris of the beauty of the day, while even she could never guess what he had suffered through its hours; and he talked kindly to Kenneth of his approaching "first night," while that terrible trial awaited himself upon the morrow.

"You must be very anxious, Bradford, now it is so near," he said. "Can you find rest from the one thought?"

"I have had a great rest to-day," replied

Kenneth, and he did not notice how thoughtfully Scot's eyes rested upon Doris Egerton's face; as if, even far off, he could understand a little of such rest.

"Where?"

"In church. The calm there always does me good."

"Yes, you are right. It stills a man's pulse, and carries his gaze a little further than—the morrow."

"Then why wouldn't you go to-day, Scot,?" inquired Miss Michal, plaintively.

"I did."

"You did! It was to a distant church, then?"

"No; I longed to-day to hear the great Cathedral service."

"I think I guess," said Doris, smiling as she met his eyes.

"I think you do," he answered, gently. "And Bradford is right, though he was not speaking of

'That Cathedral, boundless as our wonder,
Whose quenchless lamps the sun and moon supply'

—was he?"

"You didn't hear the organ to-day," said Doris, utterly comprehending him.

"Didn't I? Which is the organ?"

"Don't you remember?"

*'Its choir the winds and waves, its organ thunder,
Its dome the sky.'*"

said Doris, quoting softly the last two lines of the verse; for she never guessed that he had asked the question merely to hear her repeat the words which had been in his own heart.

"Then after all, Scot," fretted Miss Michal, "you've been out of doors all these hours—walking?"

"Walking chiefly—yes, Aunt Michal. Bradford, do you ever find that walking helps you to think? Ah, there are Colonel Egerton and Miss Bradford! Run, Willy, and open the gate."

The kind old officer, aided by Doris and Miss Joan, won his way so skilfully that the friends spent that Sunday evening all together at the Dower House; and when at last they separated even Miss Michal had no lugubrious expression on her face.

"Don't you think, Scot," she inquired briskly, as, on their homeward way, she clung to his

arm in the darkness of the March night, "that it's a pity they are all so loving and united there?"

"Ye powers, Aunt Michal! Why?"

"Don't you see why? Is it to be expected that they won't have to separate, like other human families? And think how hard it will be for them."

"Oh, I see; but it will scarcely be a separation," said Scot, quietly. "When Bradford marries——"

"I wasn't thinking of that," retorted Miss Michal, promptly; "I meant if death separated them."

"Why think of such a thing?"

"I don't know. Scot," she added, after a pause, "I think Kenneth Bradford looks very ill, and I think it mad of him to worry and plod just for such an unnecessary thing as a play. You ought to tell him so, Scot, when you next have a quiet talk with him."

"If I ever do."

"Good gracious, what's to prevent it?" inquired Miss Michal, in a wonderfully lively tone, as she read the young man's meaning; and then, with a prompt dismissal of all thought

of Kenneth, as well as of that chance which Scot had meant, on which the morrow's trial bore, she executed a nimble change of ideas.

"Scot, Miss Bradford's black silk was new this year."

"You don't say so!"

"I do indeed; though mine—though mine," repeated Miss Michal, in a burst of triumph, "is in its fourth. Well, Scot," she meditated, pensively, as she clasped her little limp fingers more closely about his arm, "it shows the value of good folding. Things should always be smoothed well over. Ruffling takes the gloss off everything."

CHAPTER XIII.

IN a crowded gallery of the crowded court, Doris Egerton sat beside her aunt. Colonel Egerton and Kenneth had left them there, before the court began to fill, and ever since then Doris had sat motionless, leaning on the rail in front of her, her face half hidden by her hands; while now and then the crowded building seemed to sway around her, and she could only steady it again by a strong mental strain, and by that fierce grip upon the bar in front.

She had wished to stay at home to-day; but, when Mr. Bradford said he would rather she went, she never hesitated—even feeling relieved that the choice was taken from her. But anxiety and sleeplessness were beginning to tell sadly upon the girl; and, though she shook her head in momentary cheerfulness, when her aunt questioned her by an anxious gaze, she knew

that her cheeks were very white and cold, and that her eyes wandered aimlessly among the crowd, because she had not power to concentrate them. So it was that she tried to hide her face from Miss Joan's loving eyes, as she sat so still in her corner of the gallery, looking over the rail into the hall below, while the words that were said had only a dim meaning for her.

Now and then she caught herself vaguely repeating one word, which she knew must have reached her ear, though she did not know from whom or how; and now and then she found herself listening eagerly for one word or name, letting all else go by, perhaps, in her zealous search for this.

It was the wakeful night which had made her feel so dazed and bewildered to-day—so she said to herself again and again, and so she said at last to her aunt, when Miss Joan had been betrayed into a little not unnatural alarm. Never once did she seem to look at Scot Monkton, yet, among the countless faces—so many of which were familiar to her—it was only *his* she saw. As, among the crowd, first one and then another rose to speak, she listened only for Scot's name, searching for it in vain, though

she knew it was of him they spoke, in those weary speeches which, while meaningless in her ears, bore a heavy meaning to her heart.

And so the hours went on, until there was a stir in the crowd, quite different from those slight movements she had noticed at intervals all day; and, when she looked round, at Kenneth's touch, the gallery was almost empty.

"The Court has dispersed for luncheon. Come, dear, I think you are in a dream. Colonel Egerton has taken Aunt Joan."

"Yes, I think I am in a dream," Doris said, drawing her fingers across her eyes. "It is all so misty; I see only the white heads. Tell me about it, Kenneth."

"Will you not come?"

"No."

"Then wait one moment."

When he returned to her, he brought a glass of wine, and stood beside her, watching her with anxious solicitude. So she drank the wine at his bidding, and smiled her thanks, the smile dying in one moment, into a glance of entreaty.

"Tell me, Kenneth, what they have said. I—it has all got mixed for me, and—and I am sleepy I suppose. Will you tell me? I can always understand you."

"You should wait until *our* side speaks," said Kenneth, in a voice of preternatural confidence.

"But I want to know all," she observed, resuming her old position against the rail, while Kenneth sat beside her in the almost deserted gallery, nervous and troubled to see her so bewildered, but quiet and gentle through all. "What did they say, Kenneth?"

"All they could, dear, of course, against Mr. Monkton."

"But I never heard his name!"

"Of course not," the young man returned, with a swift glance of anxiety into her face. "But they raked up everything they could against him; we knew they would do that. It is but fair for them to make the most of their opportunity—while it lasts."

"What a number of them there were!"

"Yes, poor things," said Kenneth, with an easy indifference as to their power and numbers, which did its work in re-assuring Doris.

"What did they say?"

"I hope you don't expect me to repeat such countless falsehoods, dear. I could scarcely tell you even the drift of them. The witnesses had

what they thought excellent proofs of Scot Monkton's hatred of Sourdets."

"Yes—I thought so."

"And," continued Kenneth, tardily, "of various unpleasant and quarrelsome meetings which had taken place between them."

"But you know, Ken——"

"Oh, I know, of course," he interposed; "but they fancy they are right—some of them. They don't know where the lie begins, because exaggeration is such a gradual ascent to it. As surely as procrastination is the thief of time, exaggeration is the thief of truth. Eh, Doris?"

"Yes?" she questioned, without noticing his smile. "Go on, Ken."

"Then they made an immense mountain out of the molehill of Mr. Monkton's having those papers, and their value to him."

"But don't they know how easily he could have bought them long ago, if he had wished?"

"I fancy they *will* know it when our turn comes, dear," said Kenneth, with a smile which seemed as earnest as his words. "In the meantime they use what strength they have, and try to believe it isn't utter weakness. They build a great deal on the fact of Mr. Monkton's having

been away from home when the fire broke out, and returning afterwards with no surprise at all."

"As if——"

"As if they wouldn't say all this while they can," put in Kenneth, with a cheerful nod, in her dreamy pause. "Then came your coachman's testimony. He had seen Mr. Monkton riding rapidly from the Green Pits, before the fire was visible across the country, and yet *after* the stack must have been ignited. That had great weight. It seemed so unnatural, his riding from home so rapidly just then, and so daring of him to cross the foot-bridge on horseback."

"If he would only explain, I know it would all be clear."

"If you could see my father's cool face down there," said Kenneth, gently interrupting her, "you wouldn't doubt about everything being clear in time. It was a pity Colonel Egerton had to corroborate Evans's testimony, wasn't it? We had been afraid they would subpoena even you. It was bad enough to bring Liath to swear to his master's absence that night."

By the way, you heard, of course, of Miss Michal?"

"No:"

"She had a subpoena served; but last night she locked herself into her own room, and she won't stir. Father gave her, through the doors a startling idea of the punishment the law has in store for her, but it never moved her. Even when he told her that her absence would do harm to our side, she was deaf to every word, and the door is still fast. Poor little Miss Michal! I can fancy her helpless panic in there. Did you notice how ably they used against us the fact of her absence?"

"Ably?"

"Yes—ably, dear. Give them their due. Didn't you notice, too, how cleverly the counsel employed the fact of Mr. Monkton's knocking down the constable, as presumptive evidence of guilt? How could one help admiring his skill, *though* it was employed on the wrong side?"

"Go on, Kenneth."

"Those wretched letters and photographs were dragged through infinite changes, and our ears were dinned with the suspicious circumstance of their being found, after the fire,

safe in the possession of the one who knew their price to be ten thousand pounds. And then Wakeley said Monsieur Sourdets had always expressed himself afraid of personal violence from Scot Monkton. Rich idea, isn't it? Stanley Monkton has spared no pains and expense in his evidence, and Wakeley has been visited by no scruples—and I give them credit."

"Oh! Kenneth."

"Decidedly I do," insisted Kenneth, glad to see how his words roused her from her dreamy bewilderment. "I think the idea of Scot Monkton's insanity was introduced most adroitly. I expect Stanley builds on a future use of that. Clever fellow, isn't he?"

"I dislike him so!"

"Do you?" asked Kenneth, in apparent surprise. "Remember his provocation. The estate he covets is shut up—useless to anyone,—and is to be put now into the hands of a child who would be just as happy with only a shilling a week."

"Hush!—please, Kenneth."

"I suppose I must," he said, smiling now—for the dazed look had left her eyes, and a little

colour burned in her cheeks—"for I must go. Here comes Aunt Joan. When I see you next, my darling—at least, when I join you again, for I can see you from my seat,—this will be over."

The court was rapidly refilling when Kenneth left her, and, after a few words to Miss Joan, (and to her father, before he went back) Doris leaned forward again, in her old attitude, and with her old stillness. But both words and faces were less misty to her now. Clearer and clearer they grew as the afternoon wore on; and, though she still shrank with keenest pain from looking into Scot Monkton's face, she could understand how differently he was spoken of now.

A ringing, questioning voice filled the hall, and her heart beat eagerly as she anticipated the answers to questions which were asked. If Scot Monkton had wished to occupy Kingswood, why had he left it? The act was a voluntary one. If he had felt his tenure insecure as long as these papers were in Monsieur Sourdets's possession, why had he not bought them while the price demanded was a trifle to him? Would he not naturally prefer to forfeit

ten thousand pounds, rather than a property worth thirty thousand a year? His solicitor would have purchased the papers on his own responsibility, but that he, too, knew them to be utterly worthless to trace the heir of Kingswood, for whom everything had been resigned. The jury had noticed how promptly and voluntarily these papers had been produced upon the inquest; was not that in itself evidence how little anxiety had ever been bestowed upon them?

So the words made themselves plain to Doris, her heart grasping only those that were simple, and putting in the familiar names as she passed with a shudder by that one word "prisoner" which was used so often. Mr. Monkton's servant had found the letters by chance, and the last thing to have been expected was their discovery after such a fire; it being unusual to carry letters, however valuable, in a fireproof box. Mr. Monkton's absence from home on the night of the fire would presently be accounted for; and his coolness or indifference in the presence of witnesses was no proof that he had with coolness or indifference witnessed the first outbreak of the flames.

There was the calling of a name which Doris did not recognise, and a sound of laughter quickly suppressed; and then she saw Liath again in the witness-box, his head so bent that he looked even more diminutive than he was. Through the countless questions, and the old man's sometimes unintelligible language, Doris grasped all he had to tell; and the *facts* stood out clearly before her, as from that minute were all the facts, however clothed, to stand until the day was over—the simple facts, which the minute and earnest questioning could not make more clear.

Liath's master had been absent from home on the night of January the twentieth, when the fire occurred. He had returned about one o'clock in the night, and Liath had met him, and told him the child had wandered to seek him; so he had gone back again towards Come-ly Place, still on horseback. In less than an hour he had returned on foot, carrying the child. The fire was raging then, but his master had not seemed surprised. He had carried the little boy into the house, and then hastened to the Green Pits, where he had never from that moment paused in his work, until late next

morning. Liath had picked up the little iron box himself, on the night of the twentieth, and given it to his master next morning. Mr. Monkton had not seemed particularly surprised or pleased; he only read the letters and replaced them.

“Lewis Raine.”

Doris could scarcely recognise the young man who had for two weeks been her groom; but his frank, direct speech, so thoroughly English, and his easy *insouciance*, so thoroughly French, gave her for the time a pleasant feeling of confidence which was new to her to-day. And, even though he began so professionally, she had no difficulty in laying his facts before herself as clearly as the others, robbed of their technicalities and many repetitions.

He had had a lantern given him to return to Oliver Wakeley, which had been used by Wakeley on the night of the twentieth of January, and never since; and he had taken from this lantern a paper, which had been folded and pushed into the socket to steady the candle. That produced was the paper. It contained a stanza of poetry, in a gentleman's writing. The lantern had been handed to him by James

Fowles, butler to Colonel Egerton, to whom it had been lent.

"James Fowles."

The butler had little to tell, Doris thought. Anna Wakeley had lent the lantern for him to light Miss Egerton home, and he had extinguished the candle just before its flame reached the paper. After that, it had never been touched until he had sent it home by the last witness.

"Doris Egerton."

Doris started back, breathing quickly; but her father had made his way to her, and was waiting.

"Come, dear, you have only to corroborate Fowles."

And then quietly—so very quietly that only a few in the crowd could guess the girl was moved at all—Doris stood and took the oath, and said the few words which were all they sought from her.

She had declined the lantern, but her servant had taken it from Anna Wakeley's hand, lighted, and had blown it out about ten minutes afterwards. She had noticed how clumsily the paper was pushed into the socket. Certainly she believed that produced to be the paper.

"Oh, Aunt Joan," she whispered, when she had regained her place at the corner of the gallery, "I am glad I did not know that was to come!"

"We would not tell you, dear. Mr. Bradford thought it best, though it was nothing at all. This," added Miss Joan, wondering, as she looked down into the hall, "is Mr. Chamberlain's old servant-man. Why——"

"Hush, auntie, please!"

The girl's face was full of intense thought, as she once more watched and listened, and gathered steadily the meaning of those words which went to and fro so slowly and carefully.

The old man remembered well the night of January the twentieth. He had taken a note from his mistress to Mr. Monkton. He went on horseback, but left the pony with Mr. Monkton, who came out to him from the house. Mr. Monkton mounted, and rode through the Green Pits, bidding him follow, and lock the gates behind him, to save time. He had stood at the gate some time after the horse's step had passed out of hearing, and as he stood there—simply wondering which way Mr. Monkton would take—a light had flashed suddenly upon him. It

was turned off in a moment, and there had been no sound even of a footstep—the light of a dark lantern, certainly. He had then returned to Comely Place on foot, and wandered about the grounds, seeking his master, until about half-past one o'clock, when Mr. Monkton returned, walking with his master, and leading the pony. The two gentlemen had parted at the gate, Mr. Chamberlain walking on to the house, Mr. Monkton mounting again, and riding towards home, intending to stable the pony at the Black Birches for the night. In about half an hour Mr. Monkton had returned to Comely Place at a gallop, having missed the child. He found the child with Miss Chamberlain, and took him, leaving the pony this time, and returning on foot. It was daylight next day before they had heard, at Comely Place, of the fire at the Green Pits.

“Margaret Chamberlain.”

Watching Margaret in surprise, Doris could never know how to Scot Monkton her appearance was a still greater matter of astonishment, nor how Mr. Bradford, when he saw this, rejoiced that he had not asked permission, but had acted only as he felt right. A little of the

old anger flashed in Doris's eyes as she looked down into the grave, saddened face, but before Margaret's words were all said, a passion of shame and remorse filled her eyes with sharp and stinging tears.

She had written a note to Scot Monkton—so the words ran to Doris, as still she set aside persistently that one word "Prisoner"—on the night of the twentieth of January. The note was to entreat him to seek her brother, who had wandered out into the darkness, excited and discomposed by the tempestuous wind; he was always excited by storm or wind, and would always wander at such times. He had returned about half-past one in the night, and said Mr. Monkton had left him at the gate. Half an hour afterwards Mr. Monkton had entered the house anxiously, to inquire for the child, who had sought him there at least two hours before, and whom she had kept, that he might return with Mr. Monkton, whom she had expected to see with her brother. Mr. Monkton had left the house on foot with the child, and it had been dawn next morning before she had known of the fire at the Black Birches, as Comely Place lay so low, and the shutters had

all been put up early, to prevent the wind disturbing her brother. That paper was in her brother's writing, and he had had it in his hand that evening, reading aloud to her what he had just written there. It was part of an ode on the death of Queen Victoria, whom her brother, in his moments of excitement, was accustomed to fancy dead.

"Steven Chamberlain."

"Doris," whispered Miss Joan, breathlessly, "I did not think of this. Look how grieved Mr. Monkton is that Mr. Chamberlain is here at all. He would evidently never have summoned either Margaret or her brother. How low Mr. Chamberlain speaks!"

Very low, yet every word was heard distinctly, in its slow, gentle clearness. But then the silence was intense now, while this man, who had been a stranger even among his neighbours, betrayed at last, before them all, the reason of his isolation.

He remembered the night they spoke of—no, not the date, but the wind; it had been high for several nights, but he had been spending the time with his sister, and the doors were locked. On that night he went out through

the library window. He wanted to hear the wind nearer; he could not stay indoors when it was calling to him. He walked by the river, and crossed by the foot-bridge near the Black Birches; when he reached the gate of the stackyard, he put down, upon the top bar, the paper he had carried in his hand, and repeated the verses. It was like singing them to music to repeat them in the wind. Afterwards he heard footsteps behind him, and he moved aside hurriedly, fearing some one was seeking him. A man passed on to the gate where he had stood, and stopped and struck a light; and then he did something to his lantern, picking a paper from the ground and putting it inside. After that the man climbed the gate, and went out of sight. He missed the paper then, and knew he must have dropped it at the gate. That was the paper, certainly. It was part of an ode on the death of Queen Victoria. No, Queen Victoria was not dead, but sometimes he felt sure she was. Yes, he could repeat the verse written there.

"Oh, auntie," sobbed Doris, when the lines had been repeated, with a dreamy slowness which was terribly pathetic, "how shall I ever forgive myself?"

But Miss Joan was crying too, for Margaret's secret had been, till now, equally unguessed by her.

Mr. Chamberlain started as if from a dream, after his verse was ended, and they had begun to question him again, while a pitiful murmur ran through the court. He had left the Green Pits, and wandered on into the wood, where Mr. Monkton had found him. He had gone home with Mr. Monkton—he always did—and had parted from him at the gate of Comely Place. Yes, he had seen distinctly, for a few moments, the face of the man who lighted the lantern and climbed into the yard. Certainly he should know him.

Turning his gentle eyes slowly from one face to another, Steven let them rest presently upon Oliver Wakeley.

“That is he.”

“Any doubt?”

“No, no doubt at all. Why should there be doubt?”

Then, with a slow, calm smile across at Scot, he turned and left the box, holding the palm of his right hand upon his forehead. And the crowd drew softly back and made a way for

him, for which he thanked them very simply and quietly.

“William Scot Monkton.”

At first, when this call was answered by a little boy whom Mr. Bradford led to his place, there was an exclamation of surprise which amounted to displeasure; but, when the child had taken the oath, and answered the first questions with his strange unchildlike seriousness, and then looked wistfully across at Scot without a smile, another sound was heard among the crowd, and Mr. Bradford, standing so composedly beside the child, knew it to mean not only sympathy but expectation.

Yes, the boy said, folding his little hands before him, as solemnly as if the oath had made the words a prayer, he remembered the night of the fire. He remembered Mr. Monkton writing a letter; then having games with him; then playing; then receiving a letter, and going out. He had said something about going to Comely Place, so presently—when Miss Michal had gone away, and he was left—he ran to the door and opened it, and called Mr. Monkton. Mr. Monkton did not answer, so he had run on—and on—towards Comely Place. And he got

there, and Miss Chamberlain was looking out at the door, and was not angry with him, but took him in. Oh, yes, he should know the door again. Miss Chamberlain showed him pictures, but he did not look at them; he only tried not to cry. Mr. Monkton came at last, and took him. He was on his shoulder most of the way home. When they came through one gate, Mr. Monkton stopped quite suddenly, and started back, and stood a long time quite still; and his shoulders were heaving, and he was frightened because they could see a blaze, and because Mr. Monkton stood so very still. He spoke at last, and tried to kiss him. But Mr. Monkton didn't, and went on, and didn't speak a word more. Yes; he had been talking before, all the while. Oh, yes, he should know the gate in a moment. It was just across the road from Comely Place.

This, in slow, childish language, was what Willy said; and, when, after his last unfailing "thank you," he looked up into Mr. Bradford's face, and asked, "Will he come *now*?" the intense gleam of hope in the question, from the grave child, touched one or two hearts with keen compassion.

"Anna Wakeley."

Her cheeks had grown hollow, and her eyes fell presently from their steadfast gaze upon her questioners ; but still she had a little of the old calm which for so long had deserted her.

She had overheard her husband and Philippe Sourdét arrange to set fire to one of the stacks at the Green Pits, on a certain night last December ; and they had left the cottage separately, after dark on that night. Before morning they had returned together, and she had heard no further word on this subject from either of them. Her husband had been imprisoned two days afterwards. He returned home on the eighteenth of January, and was surprised that Mr. Sourdét was not at the cottage. He went on expecting him up to the night of the twentieth, when he left the house, carrying with him Mr. Sourdét's lantern—yes, the one produced. He returned about two o'clock, put aside the lantern, and sat before the fire. It was many minutes after that when she first saw the flames—by chance, as the shutters had been closed. She and her husband afterwards went down to the Green Pits to assist, but she had not seen him while there. He returned home after her. From that night the lantern had never been

moved until she had given it into the hand of Colonel Egerton's butler. It had been returned to her, a few days afterwards, by a young man she had then understood to be a groom of Miss Egerton's; but, after seeming to return it, and talking about it, he had taken it away again with him. Never, since the night of the fire, had her husband stayed out late, though he had been accustomed to do so. Her husband and Mr. Sourdets had not mentioned any motive, when they had planned a fire in Mr. Monkton's yard. She had felt sure of their intention before, but only by stray words. What she overheard was the deliberate plan.

“Mary Sourdets.”

Doris's eyes—full even of gratitude as well as compassion—had been following Anna Wakeley from the court, but at this name they came back in quick surprise. Had it not been believed that there was no friend or relative to claim those disfigured remains, whose burial at last Scot Monkton himself had arranged?

The woman, standing stiff and upright, and speaking with a broad, peculiar accent which no one recognised, said she was wife to Philippe Sourdets. Since her return from Australia with

her husband, three years ago, she had lived chiefly in London, though she had spent months at a time in other places with him. She had heard of his death, but had not thought it wise to claim the body, as he had lived under various names, and she had supposed that this advertising by the name of Sourdét might be a *ruse*. She knew that her husband had possessed letters which belonged to the Monkton family, and that he had wished to sell them for ten thousand pounds. He had endeavoured at various times to obtain that sum, both from Mr. Monkton and from his solicitor; and she knew that they had not purchased because they considered the letters to be unimportant. In December of last year she had received a letter from her husband, who was then staying at Kingswood, in the house of a man named Wakeley. That was the letter. It was written in French, and explained to her a design of Wakeley's to fire Mr. Monkton's haggard, with her husband's connivance. He had agreed, because it would serve his purpose, by impoverishing Mr. Monkton.—Yes, that was a correct translation of the letter which the gentleman had given. The

handwriting was her husband's. *Of course* she could swear to it.

These were the facts which, for Doris, stood out clearly from the ceaseless questioning, and were made doubly clear at last by one voice which, with pleasant confidence, pronounced no link missing in the evidence—spoke of Stanley Monkton as one who had a selfish interest in all he said, because he contested the claims of this child, who was lawful heir to his family property; and of Oliver Wakeley as a man who had already been convicted fourteen times in a court of law.

Then Doris knew that the judge was speaking, and that in a few minutes more——

* * * * *

“Doris—Doris, my child, look up! Are you not glad? My darling, did you not hear the verdict?”

But Doris did not lift her head. The intense and overpowering joy of hearing those two words, “Not guilty,” had done what suspense and anxiety could not do, and there upon the rail of the gallery, she leaned in utter unconsciousness.

Though, under Miss Joan's skilful treatment,

she opened her eyes presently, and walked from the court, and spoke now and then in greeting or farewell to those who stopped her; it was not until Kenneth was driving her home in the pony-carriage, in the fresh evening air, that the scattered memories assembled, and formed themselves strong and clear again within her brain.

"When you heard the verdict, were you so glad, my darling?" Kenneth asked it gently, as he turned to face her. To him it seemed natural that the heat and excitement of such a new experience, and her deep sympathy with Scot Monkton, should have caused her to faint; but he knew that it had been in the reaction of gladness. "We never, from the beginning of the trial, had the slightest fear of what the verdict would be."

"I suppose I need not have had," said Doris, gently, "as he was innocent. Mr. Bradford——"

"Mr. Bradford," laughed Kenneth, in her pause, "has not been content with proving Scot Monkton innocent, dear; he has got the guilty man fast now. We had him arrested as he left the court; Raine had got the warrant.

Now I suppose my father will be happy. He has ensured Anna Wakeley's safety and comfort—for the man is sure to get twenty-one years, if not a sentence for life—and, besides that, he has fulfilled what he considers one of man's highest duties—got rid of a rascal."

"Oh! Kenneth, what good news! Now Anna can lead a peaceful and untroubled life. Where are papa and Aunt Joan?"

"Aunt Joan drove at once to the Black Birches, to comfort Miss Michal, and took little Willy in the carriage with her, and Liath on the box. My pet, you should have heard a few of little Liath's expressions of joy; you must have laughed, in spite of all. Colonel Egerton is with Mr. Monkton, and so is Major Porter, and a host more of Scot Monkton's friends."

"And his cousin?"

"Oh, he went away, defiant. But taking shelter too, surreptitiously, under the wing of his landlord—not Sutton, the Squire's old butler; *he* suggestively requested him to move out of his hotel some time ago, when his motive here was first guessed. Did you hear Sutton's cheer to-day?"

"And Margaret Chamberlain?" asked Doris,

after a pause, uttering very gently now the name she had so long spoken only with impatience.

"She went home with her brother as soon as his evidence was over."

"Kenneth, how was that done? How could she be persuaded?"

"Quite easily, dear," he replied, understanding her great earnestness. "Margaret herself saw it was right, and needed no persuasion from my father; so did Anna Wakeley—at last."

"And how did he find a relative of Monsieur Sourdet's, when the attempt had been in vain before?"

"That was managed by my father, though with a good deal of difficulty. He traced her from San Remo, where he had once had a rather curious scene with her, which gave him the vantage-ground he needed; and he had another scene with her in London. She was not easily led (even though she had no more fear of her husband); but Raine found out enough to assure him she would not be above a bribe, and he was right. As she said, she had been afraid to claim relationship, because she knew various secrets of her husband's life; but I

believe they had helped each other pretty equally, both being unscrupulous and fond of money."

There was a brief silence, while the ponies ran on in the chilly twilight.

"I wish," said Doris, at last, speaking regretfully, just as they came within sight of Kingswood, "that I had spoken to Mr. Monkton. I did not seem—awake."

"I don't think he missed your words, dear," observed Kenneth, with a smile, "for I never saw anyone look so glad and grateful as *you* did when you shook hands with him, before I drove you off in such a hurry."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE drawing-room at Comely Place was darkened a little next morning, for Miss Chamberlain sat alone there, suffering from a painful headache. She lay back in her low chair, her eyes and teeth both closed in her pain; and while she sat thus, some one entered the room unannounced, and came softly to her side.

"Margaret," whispered Doris, frightened a little at the look of pain, and slipping involuntarily to her knees upon the rug, as she laid her hands on Margaret's, "will you ever forgive me? I have been so cold, while you have had so much to suffer! I never knew till yesterday. Oh! Margaret, can you ever forgive me?"

"Why was it?" asked Margaret, as she wearily opened her eyes; "why did you always shun me?"

"Did you not know? I thought you would know. I resented your treatment of Arthur."

"My treatment of Arthur!" echoed Margaret, in a slow, wondering tone. "Oh! Doris, my child, I hope and pray that you may never know such love as mine for Arthur."

"You love him, Margaret! And yet——"

"Yes," she interrupted, gently; "and yet I am here alone, Margaret Chamberlain still; and he is alone elsewhere, blaming me in his heart—as he must do—as he will do all his life."

"You loved him," pursued Doris, lost in wonder, "and you let him go away believing that you cared nothing for him!"

"Yes. Could I do otherwise, with this cloud upon my life! You see it now—every one will see it now—and I can speak of it even to you. You can see now how impossible it was that I should consent to be the wife of—of *any one*, but most of all of one I loved so dearly, and into whose life I could not be the one to bring care and misery."

"I see your reason—your brave reason," said Doris, thoughtfully. "But why did you not tell him, Margaret?"

"And give him," Margaret answered, smiling sadly, "this pain I bear, as well as lengthen for myself the suffering of resisting him?"

"I can see now," said Doris, softly, "*how* you loved him."

"Loved him!" cried Margaret, her thin fingers tightly locked. "I loved him more dearly far than my own happiness—and you must know, Doris, how in our youth we all love happiness. Did you never guess what was my love for him, by my wish to love you—his sister? It was not for *yourself* I sought you when you first came. How could it be, when you were cold as ice to me? But you were Arthur's sister, and I longed to give to one *he* loved a little of the love with which so long ago he had filled my heart."

"Oh, Margaret," cried Doris, softly, in a very passion of appeal, "will you ever forgive me for my hard judgment of you?"

"It is forgotten long ago, dear; not only because I could resent nothing which Arthur's sister said, or left unsaid, but because you were so pleasant and so bright to Steven. Doris, I shall never, through all my life, forget the gratitude I felt to you for that."

"I—I think," faltered Doris, looking up from Margaret's knee, "I longed always to be your friend, but I dared only try to be Steven's, because of my fealty to Arthur. I—I had hard work always, Margaret—it seems to me now in looking back—really to *believe* you heartless; and the harder it was the more I persisted. Oh, how can you bear that Arthur should think you heartless too?"

"Even that is better, far better," said Margaret, with deep earnestness, "than that a child of his should ever suffer, in the after years, as I have suffered; or lead that living death which has been my father's for twelve years, and, which, at any moment, may be Steven's"

"Oh, Margaret, how terrible!"

"The fear and the responsibility make it almost a living death for me too, sometimes," continued Margaret, slowly; "yet only sometimes. I am grateful in my heart for being spared to Steven, and he is often very happy with me. Only now and then does this dangerous excitement seize him—the excitement of which he himself spoke yesterday in court. Any commotion of the elements, wind, or rain, or thunder, excites him terribly, and he escapes at once into

it. Those are the times when I fear how it may end; and yet between the attacks he is quiet, and sensible—as you have known him. The physician who has charge of my father, says Steven's faculties are only enchained, and that he knows the right and may be trusted to follow it; though his own personal safety must be in danger during his wanderings. So there is always the fear for him, and I have sadly dreaded this last excitement of appearing at the trial."

"Yet you risked it?"

"Indeed I risked it," said Margaret, thoughtfully, "for Scot's sake, who would never himself have asked it, but has always kept my secret honourably, and has been true and good to Steven. I don't know how Mr. Bradford managed it all, but I had little trouble after my first request to Steven; and—and I saw how gently and skilfully he had been dealt with, by his ease and clearness yesterday. I know quite well that Steven sometimes really *thinks*, and that he had been convinced yesterday that he was—by remembering everything—to help Scot."

"And he did."

"Yes, he did; and what do we not both owe to Scot? Not of great gifts, or denial, so much as of constant, thoughtful help, on which we could always lean and trust. Long ago he made me promise to trust him always (in this neighbourhood, only he and his father have ever known our secret), and I did indeed trust him, seeking him always in my fear. No one else could, or would, have helped me as he did; with no one else would Steven have returned to me so quietly and willingly. So is it wonderful that I should think gratefully of Scot Monkton?"

"But, Margaret," said Doris, gazing wistfully up through her tears, "if you had told Arthur the truth, he would have made it easier for you."

"Nothing could make it easier," Margaret answered, with deep thought. As it has been, it will go on to the end; and then, perhaps—as I shall be true to him through all my life,—I may tell him so in Heaven."

"And you have bravely given up your own life——"

"No," interrupted Margaret, with a gentle smile; "it was no brave deed. I saw that only

one thing was right for me to do, and I—I left the rest to God. Though my life must always be a life apart——”

“No, no!” cried Doris, eagerly, “never apart, Margaret—never apart from me again! Oh! Margaret, never apart from me, for Arthur’s sake!”

“Dear little friend,” said Margaret, tenderly, as she bent to kiss the pleading face, “I have loved you always, *for Arthur’s sake*. And now you will think less hardly of me?”

“Less hardly! Oh! Margaret, what a lesson for me never to judge another! Can you really let me be your friend, and Steven’s?”

“You have always been Steven’s friend,” said Margaret, clasping the hand which sought hers. “Now let us go to him.”

They found him in the high shrubbery which nearly surrounded the house, and he stopped, and smiled to see them. He had been singing softly to himself, but the low, uncertain notes ceased at their approach.

“It was a lark,” he said, touching Doris’s shoulder with one hand, while he pointed with the other; “he will finish it quite as well alone. Did you come to listen?”

They strolled on together, and, as Doris talked and listened to him, the dazed look left his face, and he talked gently and sensibly, the abrupt break in some of his sentences being filled brightly by Doris. She idled with them a long time, seeing that it did Steven good, and that Margaret, in her care for him, was pleased; and when she left, she asked, quite wistfully, if she might come again soon.

* * * * *

Kenneth was waiting for her near Comely Place, and they loitered together in the Winter sunshine, picturing Kenneth's coming triumph, and making the most of these last hours they could spend together. When, at last, the parting was over, Doris went to her own room, and wrote—first a long letter to her brother in Mexico; and then a tiny one to Kenneth, in London, that it might surprise him the next morning, and—as he told her that her letters always did—make the whole day seem bright.

And he, recalling her dear words, went on, with eager earnestness, up the steep path he trod to meet his fate.

CHAPTER XV.

“**T**HEN you don’t like this room, my darling?”
“You may well laugh as you ask me, Kenneth. Of course I don’t.”

This was Doris Egerton’s first visit to Kenneth’s room in the quiet street between the Strand and the river; and she had come with him now because she wished to see where he had written most of the drama which to-night she was to see upon the stage.

“Doris, I can scarcely believe that there has really come at last the realization of that dream which has been mine for so many years.”

He had stopped in his task of sorting the papers on the table, his eyes resting upon her, as she stood looking out.

“I shall never be able again to imagine the seventeenth of April a usual sort of day, Ken,” she remarked, brightly, and, though her eyes

had not turned back to meet his, he smiled as he resumed his task.

"Kenneth," she said, presently, with a shudder, "some of the windows here look as if they had not been opened for ages. How dismal for you!"

"Not for me, dear; I rarely see them. There's a curious legend attached to one room though—dismal indeed, as you say. The shutters have really been closed for years, and the room has been fastened. No wonder, though; for if a bride—she was almost a bride that day—can prove faithless to her promised husband——"

"It ought to make her house look dismal for a hundred years," put in Doris, hurriedly, as she joined him at the table.

"But," Kenneth went on, as he slowly tore up a loose sheet of manuscript, "it was the *lover's* home which was left so, and—it isn't a hundred years ago, dear."

"Many of these houses have gloomy legends belonging to them, haven't they, Kenneth?"

"There are historical associations——"

"Ah, but those are not so interesting as ghosts; your room has a ghost, I dare say."

"It has a good many," said Kenneth, smiling.

"How suddenly that little llegend roused you from your thoughtfulness, Doris!"

"Because I felt," returned Doris, her eyes very bright and true, as she stood beside him, "how different it was to be faithful! Oh, the wide, wide difference there is between the two words, though we can write them with nearly all the letters the same. Ken, what a terrible life that girl must have led—*afterwards*! But I don't want to hear more of her."—"And so," she added, presently, "your room is haunted, is it, Ken? Not, I'm afraid, by one melancholy, interesting ghost, but by a crowd of little Pucks and Oberons."

"No," laughed Kenneth. "Do you remember whose chamber 'filled was with flies, which buzzed about him. These flies are thoughts and fantasies, devices, dreams, and'—no, that's all, as Miss Michal says."

"Yet you say you are fond of the room, Ken?" questioned Doris, reflectively.

"I shall feel so if I succeed to-night; but if I fail——"

"You are very fond of that 'if,'" said Doris, demurely. "If you were gifted a little more, Ken, you would see how you misplace it."

"Even when people prognosticate success for me," resumed Kenneth, in his thoughtful way, "I only feel that they do not understand what is my dream of success."

"But I do," asserted Doris, speaking very brightly for his sake; "and, even if there were a chance of the possibility of a failure, Kenneth, in my heart there never could be any such word. Could you and I, dear Ken, go any less faithfully through life just because these people who chance to listen to your verse to-night cannot detect its beauty and power?"

"Your words are bright and pleasant, like yourself, dear," Kenneth said; "but think how I could bear to hear the world pitying *you* for my infatuation! If my drama is a failure to-night, Doris, it will be a great failure—greater than I dare to picture."

"Then, of course, if it is a success, it will be a great success. You would understand this more completely if you hadn't been working so hard lately."

"If your prophecy be true, though, darling, all the hard work will soon be made up to me. But I have not worked hard—unless thought is work—and I don't know at all why I should

look so gaunt as I do. I thought of poor Thomas Churchyard this morning, when I first caught sight of my face in the glass. Do you remember how he says—

‘I look in glass, and find my cheeks so lean—
And hollow eyes in wrinkled brow doth shroud,
As though two stars were creeping under cloud?’”

“I suppose he was about a hundred when he wrote that,” remarked Doris, dryly; “and you have no sense of the fitness of things. Now come, Ken; you don’t deserve to look so handsome as you will to-night, or that I should be so proud of you as I shall be sure to be, Kenneth”—with puckered lips and dancing eyes—“you will never be able to take your eyes from my dress!”

“I think I shall,” he said, with his dreamy smile; “but they will not stray far from the dress, either. What is it?”

“Just as if you would understand, even if I elaborately described it!”

“Try me.”

“When I warn you,” she began, gravely—they were out in the quiet street now, walking side by side—“that it is made of a French material, do you still rush headlong into confusion?”

"Yes."

"Then what do you think of—*crétonne*? Oh! this is too much!" she added, as Kenneth laughed frankly out. "I expected you to say that that would look beautiful, knowing nothing at all yourself about it, and relying implicitly on my taste. Why, you actually seem to know what *crétonne* is, Ken!"

"Slightly. Has your dress birds of Paradise all over it?"

"You evidently think you understand a great deal," she answered with dignity; "but I know, if I told you the real material, you would have no notion of it."

"Perhaps not; but tell me the colour."

"I shall tell you everything," said the girl, with a sudden change of tone. "It's what you always call *two* dresses, Ken; first, a gorgeous silk one, the colour of a turquoise—I chose that, because in Warsaw, where papa bought me my turquoise ring, they told him its colour indicated prosperity—and then over it there's a gauzy sort of white fabric, which I'm sure *you* couldn't understand, because I shall never understand it myself until I see it on. Of course it is altogether quite simple—not a ball-dress at

all—only I wanted it to be, as far as possible, perfect for to-night, Do you think you shall like it?"

"If you went in——"

"*Crétonne*, with birds of paradise," suggested Doris.

"Yes; however you went, dear, there would be none prettier or brighter in the theatre."

"In your eyes," added the girl, in her soft tones. "I like to think that, Ken."

As they walked on, through the busy streets and the quiet ones, Doris chatted brightly, and kept Kenneth's attention engrossed; though every now and then, as they passed the walls on which was placarded the name of his drama, the talk would again fall, for a little, into the old groove.

"But, Kenneth," cried Doris, astonished, when he offered her his hand in the portico of Miss Bradford's house in Gordon Square, "you are coming in, of course? Aunt Joan will just be ready for luncheon."

"No, I cannot stay, dear; I am going to the theatre. Besides, I am not hungry—indeed I could not eat."

"But a glass of wine, Ken? You must come!"

He shook his head, and stopped a passing cab.

"Good-bye for a little time," he said.

"You—you won't do anything unnecessary to-day, Ken," she entreated, standing with her hand in his in the quiet shadow of the portico, "to tire yourself before to-night."

"No, darling."

"You—you feel hopeful, Kenneth," she went on, impelled to the questions by some feeling which she hardly comprehended, "and—and happy?"

"So happy, darling, in your love."

She stood to see him start, with a smile upon her lips ; and she had a smile for her aunt when she joined her a minute or two afterwards ; yet, before they rose from the luncheon-table, Miss Joan wondered—only once aloud, but many times to herself—why she heard no sound of the familiar laughter.

When they entered the drawing-room, Doris tempted her aunt to that window which opened to the roof of the portico, under an awning and among the flowers ; then she drew her own low chair beside her aunt's, but did not seem to have any words to say to Miss Joan,

though she looked wistfully at her once or twice, as if she would have liked a voice to break her own long thought.

And so the afternoon wore slowly on.

"You've never once turned a leaf, I firmly believe," remarked Miss Joan at last. "Aren't you reading?"

"No, auntie."

"Would you not like to go and play, then?"

"Oh, no!"

Again the silence; while Miss Joan knitted, uninterrupted by the anxious glances she cast at the girl, and while Doris looked out upon the tiny leaves stirring softly on the plantain-trees; and thought of the many, many times she had sat here, as a child, with Kenneth, weaving romances, boundless as the Summer sky, yet brought back to her always by the sight of the narrow line of trees before her.

"There, Doris," cried Miss Joan, delighted at the interruption, when a servant brought in a parcel for Miss Egerton; "what do you guess that can be?" ("For now," thought Miss Joan, with a feeling of great relief, "I shall have her once more alert and cheerful.")

"What is it, auntie? What can it be?"

"Perhaps you would learn more readily if you looked inside, my dear."

So Doris, smiling now, cut the string, to find an inner paper on which was written, "With Kenneth's love," and which enfolded a morocco case.

"Oh, Aunt Joan," she cried, without raising her head, when she had opened the case, "it is a whole set of turquoise ornaments! So lovely!"

"Doris, my dear, when you have quite satisfactorily returned from your reverie, perhaps you will show me the jewels."

"Oh, Auntie," cried the girl, rising quickly at this reminder of her long silence, "how forgetful of me! I was only thinking."

"But I don't quite see, my dear," rejoined Miss Joan, looking through her spectacles at Doris, as she knelt beside her, "why, with such a gift in your hand, the thought should have been a sad thought."

"No, Auntie," Doris assented, softly, as she kissed her, "but I couldn't help it. I have the hardest work to avoid being sad to-day—even to-day of all days—and—and these made me more so. Oh, what would I not give if the day

were over—for Kenneth's sake?"

"Is he so anxious still, dear?"

"No, I think not, but I cannot look at him, or even think of him, without knowing how much he considers at stake to-day."

Miss Joan, sitting so quietly there, with her clear gaze on her pet's face, saw—as a simple, loving nature often will see—the kindest and the wisest way to treat this inexplicable depression, for which she had hardly been unprepared in the excitement of the day.

"They are very beautiful!" she said, looking down upon the ornaments. "In your chosen dress, and in these, dear, you will look lovely enough to give Kenneth, without a word, the brightest compliment of the night."

"Thank you, Aunt Joan."

Another silence, which was broken wistfully, at last, by Doris.

"Auntie, I—I wish you would talk."

"My dear," returned the old lady, grasping, with the greatest dexterity, the consciousness that the girl was weary of her own thoughts, "I am always talking. I was talking then, wasn't I?—or was it only to myself? You see, I often talk to myself when I am here

alone, and I daresay you sometimes hear me, and laugh."

"Indeed I don't, auntie," said Doris, feeling already that her aunt's simple words were slowly driving back into chaos her haunting and foreboding thoughts; "I expect you talk to yourself *quietly*—for you were very quiet just then."

"Perhaps so, my dear," acknowledged Miss Joan, briskly, her kind heart prompting her so effectually in her search for conversation, that she had already gained her desire. "I was wondering then why genius doesn't run more in families. There's a partiality and want of fairness about its choosing one, and leaving his relatives quite ordinary mortals. I'm sure, if I had had my wish, I should have been a genius; and, as wishing is the only thing we can do towards getting it, if we do our best in that, we ought to be successful—don't you think so, my dear?"

"We should all be geniuses, I suppose, if that were so," said Doris, as the thoughts went slowly farther and farther back into that chaos from which they had risen.

"Yes, I suppose we should," assented Miss

Joan, immediately; "and the world would not, perhaps, be so comfortable. But I always was a hero-worshipper," she resumed, after only a moment's pause, her eyes upon her knitting, and her mind, to all appearance, buried in her reminiscences. "Once, when I was in Ireland, I walked five miles to see the celebrated Miss Mangnall. I remember quite well how your papa teased me, and said her celebrity was questionable—a sort of joke, my dear, upon her book of Questions. Well—where was I?"

"Did you see her?" asked Doris, falling, without suspicion, though with unconscious willingness, into the conversational snare prepared for her.

"I did, my dear; and a great blow it was. She was a small old lady, in a mob cap—that did not matter; but she was cheerful, and I never could reconcile myself to that fact, and never shall. That she should be cheerful after writing so much grammar, and wading through the Reformation, the Revolution, and the Restoration, was, and is, incredible to me; and doesn't look straightforward and natural, my dear."

"What next, auntie?" asked Doris, fairly laughing now.

“My next excitement was when a friend promised me a thimble which had been Jane Austin’s. Think of it, I did, day and night. A thimble which had touched the hand that immortalised *Emma*, and threw such a charm round *Pride and Sensibility*—I think that is the title, my dear, but sometimes my memory is a little deceptive in fiction, as you know. I suppose it was because my enthusiasm was so boundless over this anticipation, that my friend found it best not to encourage me by ever fulfilling her promise. Yet I never remember,” continued the old lady, in her musing, cheerful tone, “being myself visited by the divine afflatus, or attempting literature, save in a diary—which, though rather a fashionable form for fiction, is, in my opinion, rather inclined to be personal. For instance, take to-day for an example—‘*Wednesday, April 17.*—Discovered the moths in my sable. Letter from one of my old housemaids, who finds that the gentlemanly man she has married is what he calls an “asker,” which is nothing more nor less than a professional beggar, to whom belongs a certain corner in Regent Street. She has a comfortable house and good income, but still she

is not satisfied, an uncomfortable consciousness of his daily dilapidations militating against her perfect enjoyment. No other letter, but an invitation to dine with the Brents—refused it, as their soup is always cold, and their *entrées* too highly flavoured, and old Miss Brent always sings “Life let us cherish,” which is, I think, impossible upon their dinners. This evening——” Quick as thought Miss Joan changed the drift of her words, as she felt how nearly they would touch her own heart, as well as Doris’s, in the mention of what the evening was to witness. “That, my dear, would have been a good specimen day, and yet I feel that, as literature, it might be deficient in excitement for the general public. What do you see, my dear?”

“Mr. Bradford, auntie. May I open the door to him?”

Doris was down the stairs almost before Miss Joan had answered, but still, when she returned to the old lawyer’s side, it seemed as if even those few minutes had sufficed to bring back that incomprehensible heaviness of heart which was so new to her.

“Kenneth not here?” questioned Mr. Bradford, looking round him in surprise.

"He went to the rehearsal," Doris answered; "but he said he would certainly return to dinner."

"I doubt his remembering to-day that life holds such an institution as dinner. Joan, I should ask for a glass of your port, only ten to one it will have been standing for three or four days in the decanter. That's the worst of being a small family."

"You should come oftener to help me," said Joan, as she rang; "but I will insure you a fresh bottle, cousin."

"I'll try to believe it—even while I drink it."

Epicure as he was, he took the wine at a draught, and both Miss Joan and Doris saw that he could maintain his usual calm now only by a great effort; still he *did* maintain it, and, to all appearance, talked on with coolness and indifference.

"Then you are really going to-night, Joan?" he questioned, with a brightening of his face which touched Miss Joan visibly.

"Yes, I have changed my mind, though I still——"

"Pooh, pooh! If you are weak enough to go, you cannot be wise enough to have qualms.

Off to decorate, are you, Doris? And as silent as the harp that once—— Jaques made a mistake, my dear, in thinking it good to be sad and say nothing.”

“I don’t, Mr. Bradford—indeed I don’t,” said Doris, eagerly. “I—I know I’ve been silent, but, in truth, I had no cause. And, as for being sad to-day of all days——”

“I see no difference between to-day and yesterday,” was the quick rejoinder, “and to-morrow.”

“But you *will* see a difference, Mr. Bradford, before the day is over. Wait and see.”

Doris was first to return to the drawing-room, as she had fancied Kenneth would be there. But, except that Mr. Bradford walked slowly to and fro through the length of both the drawing-rooms, they were empty. Never afraid of a rebuff from the old man, even in his sternest moods, she went gently up and stood before him, to show him Kenneth’s present; and, while she stood so, smiling at the admiration so plainly to be read in his shrewd eyes, though expressed rather ambiguously by the one word, “Indeed!” Colonel

Egerton and Scot Monkton came in together, and there was a further examination of the turquoise ornament.

"I will take them off," said Doris; for she saw that Mr. Monkton, from where he stood, could not see them quite as they should be seen.

"Well done, Kenneth," said Colonel Egerton, cordially, as he passed them on.

"What do you think of them now?" asked Doris, when they reached Scot's hands.

"The workmanship, you mean?"

"Not exactly; but the beauty of them altogether."

"You have prevented my seeing that. I understood I was to study the back of the setting."

"If you will allow me," said Doris, with the greatest gravity, "I would suggest that they look prettier the right side up."

"Prettier is but a mean comparative. Let us see where they look prettiest of all."

She took the ornaments, and put them on again, smiling a little to see how everyone watched her, and only the very faintest tinge of colour rising in her cheeks, because she was

sure that Mr. Monkton had a laugh in his eyes.

"And pray, Miss Egerton," inquired her father, finding it quite impossible to conceal his intense pride in her, as she stood before him; her blue eyes shy in all their merriment, her lips breaking from their gravity into smiles, her dress exquisite in the richness of its turquoise sheen, and the purity of its soft whiteness; "do you consider we are apparelled with sufficient gorgeousness to accompany you?"

"Don't you see, papa," she answered, very softly, as she looked up into his face, "I wished to please and compliment Kenneth to-night?"

Miss Joan had entered now, soft and harmonious, like an evening landscape, in her white lace and lilac satin—and still Kenneth had not come. Scot walked to a window to look out for him; and just then, for the first time, the old lawyer ceased the cool remarks by which he had chosen to detain Doris beside him, and she came up to Scot.

"Mr. Monkton, I am sure it was you who sent me two white roses this afternoon. I found them in my room when I went to dress."

"Yes, I sent them," he confessed, frankly. "I felt sure Kenneth would give you your

bouquet, as well as the flowers you wear (you nearly always wear flowers; I've noticed that ever since I knew you first); but I thought you would leave mine at home, and perhaps they might not be faded on your return. I believe it was ridiculous to buy them, for they have no pretensions to a bouquet."

"They are very lovely!" said Doris, utterly unconscious how lovely she herself was, in his eyes, just then, with that wonderful gentleness which sometimes enfolded her in his presence, as if it were the subtle consciousness of a pain near her which she could not grasp. "This is Kenneth's bouquet; isn't it beautiful? And these"—touching a few snowdrops which nestled, almost unseen, where her dress fastened below the open frilling at her throat—"are Kenneth's too; but I have left only one of your roses to greet us when we come home. The other is—do you recognise it?"

She bent her head down, just as if she had forgotten that he must look *down* upon it in any way; and, for a moment, the fragrance of the rose gave him a thrill of happiness which was rare with him. In the next, he turned his eyes from the sunny hair and the rich flower.

"I hope you will be able to get it out readily, when you need a flower to throw at any of the actors."

"Oh, that reminds me!" she said, with a laugh. "I must show you the bouquet Mr. Levey has sent me. I hadn't intended to take it, but now I see how I can make it useful. I suppose"—demurely—"gentlemen don't, as a rule, care to carry bouquets?"

"I could fancy its constituting the height of bliss for some men—Mr. Bradford, for instance."

"Or yourself, Mr. Monkton," laughed Doris. A sudden rapid wish darted into her head just then—as she noticed that he wore no flowers—but it did not reach her lips. In her heart she knew him better than she fancied, even when his light words puzzled her. "It is a fine bouquet," she said, gravely.

"And he is a fine fellow," put in Mr. Bradford, who had strolled up to them. "Doris, surely Aunt Joan has not educated you so blindly that you don't discern the advantage of prunello over leather. And so the Leveys are in town for to-night?"

"Everybody is in town for to-night," asserted Scot, in his genial way.

Just then Kenneth came in, pale and with almost a fevered brightness in his eyes, but unusually calm.

"I presume," observed Mr. Bradford, putting on his glasses to examine his son, and imagining that his voice was as unmoved as usual "that you have been detained dotting your paid men over the theatre to guide and insure plenty of applause—packing the house, in fact, to use your own vernacular—eh, lad?"

"Indeed, father," said Kenneth, with great earnestness, "I should not call *that* success."

"Oh, success is a crowd *without* packing, is it? What folly! Can you suggest any mortal show or excitement which a crowd will *not* collect to see? Why, the biggest I ever witnessed had rushed together to see one of Astley's clowns sail from Vauxhall to Westminster in a washing tub drawn by geese! That was just thirty years ago, and you weren't born, lad. If I'd known you'd been going to act clown to-day, and gather a crowd of your own, I'd never have had you baptized."

They all laughed, save Kenneth; but then he was answering Miss Joan's signal that dinner waited.

"I will go and dress, then, Aunt Joan," he said, as if the prospect of dinner in no way touched him. "No, thank you," he added, with the old lifting of his hand to his forehead, when one or two of them exclaimed that of course he must dine. "I should like"—with a brightening of his tone at the thought—"I should like a cup of tea, Aunt Joan—of your particular tea, as it used to be in old times, when you first taught Doris to make it."

"I see," said Doris, brightly; "I shall make it this time too, Kenneth. You will find it here, all ready."

When, half an hour afterwards, he re-entered the room, to find Doris alone in the twilight, with a table drawn up among the flowers at the open window, and the tea waiting, his eyes filled with tears. She thought it not unnatural; because in the nervous tension of his excited feelings, tears must be very near to eyes that had lately known so little sleep. But he knew that, weak as he was, these womanish tears would not have risen, but that, beyond the soothing prettiness of the picture, came the sudden realization of her having left them all to wait here for *him*, as if she knew how entirely she belonged to him.

"Dinner is quite over, Ken," she said, lifting the cosy and looking inquiringly into the teapot, to make a perfect certainty of not being able to see the tears in his eyes; "but papa isn't going to leave his wine just yet—not he! I expect"—with a pleasant little matronly air—"that they will join our tea as soon as ever they can."

"*Our* tea!" repeated Kenneth, taking the seat she had drawn up for him, and leaning one arm rather wearily upon the table, though his face had no weariness in its bright glance of love. "How you must have hastened over dinner, to give me this pleasure! And I see how kind they all are to treat my discourtesy and my whims so generously. I know they will come presently, and I know why; but in the meantime they have given you to me for these few minutes. Doris, I wish I could tell you—I tried before, but I could not—how lovely you look to-night."

"But I know," returned Doris, with gravity. "That is one of the few things I know better than you do, Ken. Tell me something else."

"I cannot: my thoughts will hold only you just now."

"That's most ungrateful of you. Where is your appreciation of that splendid cup of tea? Why, you have finished it, Ken!"

"Yes; will you give me another? I am so glad you liked my present, Doris. I heard your whispered thanks, but the dearest return was to see the ornaments on you."

"You remember the legend of the stone?" asked Doris, as she sipped her own tea complacently.

"Yes, that was why I chose them. You have granted every one of my requests to-day, Doris. I see my snowdrops in your dress. You remember how you wore them on that afternoon at Richmond when you made me a promise about to-night? The time between that day and this seems very short. Yet to think of the changes it has wrought in some lives—Mr. Monkton's, for instance!"

"Wasn't it pleasant of him to come from the Black Birches for to-day, Ken? And doesn't he look to-night as if he had never known such great troubles, and difficulties, and privations as he has had?"

"He can no more help looking easy and happy, when he wishes to encourage anyone—as he wishes now to encourage me—than he

can help looking as thorough an aristocrat in his harvest-fields at the Black Birches as he does to-night. No; don't tempt me, darling. I cannot eat, even at your request; but I will have more tea, please. What a quiet Spring evening, Doris! And how peaceful the old square looks! If no happiness were to lie beyond this night for me, I feel that I have had my share, even if only in those hours we have spent together here, for whole Summer evenings, weaving romances."

"You teaching me everything," whispered Doris, softly.

"But *you* always teaching me," he answered, with his gentle smile, "how to love you."

"Now the brougham is at the door. Ken, dear Ken, you will have no faint heart, will you? For it must need all one's strength to meet face to face the greatest triumph of one's life. Yes, Aunt Joan, I'm ready."

"Then come, dear; your papa and Mr. Monkton walked on ten minutes ago, and I would not keep them waiting in the vestibule. Make haste, Kenneth. Though your father is a model of patience to-night—not that he thinks we see it, though—I would not keep him longer pacing the hall."

CHAPTER XVI.

COLONEL EGERTON'S box was still unoccupied, while the author's, which was next to it, was rather over-crowded; but then this was only a temporary gathering about the chairs of Miss Bradford and Doris. The girl's eyes wandered round the crowded building, with a brilliance in them which in itself would have made her a mark of observation, even if her prettiness and grace had not done so.

"I see—oh, I can see such numbers of faces I know! Can you, Kenneth?"

"No," he answered, turning his head slowly;

"I see no one whom I know, Doris. I see a crowd, but I cannot recognise one face."

The brilliance left her eyes in a moment, but, after that anxious glance at him, she looked round, with a strange, nervous wistfulness.

"They will give us more light presently," she

said; and then she studied her programme for a few minutes in utter silence.

"The Miss Leveys are exactly opposite us; I have acknowledged them, and now they are bowing to you, Ken."

"Bradford has just been called away, Miss Egerton."

"Then it is to *you* Miss Levey is bowing," she said, turning with a smile to Scot.

He had been in a group at the back of the box ever since their entrance, but now he was on the chair beside her.

"I'm sure," she said, in her unconscious acknowledgment of how cool and easy he appeared, "that you must know everybody here, Mr. Monkton."

"I know the Miss Leveys; but do you insist on my salaaming, because I have been with them for some minutes in the vestibule?"

"I—I thought Miss Levey bowed directly to you, "but I suppose I made a mistake. I wonder where her brother is?"

"On his way to your box," returned Scot, placidly; "I saw him start the instant he recognised you; therefore an unpropitious fate must have lured him from his circumnavigation."

"I wish Margaret were here," said Doris, thoughtfully.

"So do I; but I could not prevail on her to come."

"You did try? I might have known you would."

"Miss Egerton," asked Scot, recalling the time when she had spoken so differently of Margaret—though the recollection of how her secret had been made to win this change, could not yet bring anything but a shadow to his brow—"do you know the great men here—men, I mean, whose names are great in art?"

"Only very few of them. Please to point them out to me, Mr. Monkton. I felt quite sure you knew everybody, because so many gentlemen—and ladies too—spoke to you as we came upstairs."

She did not see his smile as she leaned forward; eager for his information, that she might tell Kenneth, afterwards, what a distinguished audience had listened to his words. One after another, he pointed out the men whose names were known in music, art, and literature; and her eyes followed his, radiant

in their excitement, while many an admiring glance was turned upon her.

"Mr. Bradford," said Doris, eagerly, "there's Doctor Boyd."

"So I see. I always thought Boyd a sensible man until to-night."

"Let us hope he never credited T. & C. Bradford with much sense," remarked Colonel Egerton, laughing. "Boyd asked me, on his way in, how Kenneth had fortified himself; but I couldn't tell whether he was pleased or vexed about the freak for tea. By the powers, Bradford, just look how crammed the house is getting!"

"Such an audience is a triumph in itself," observed Scot, speaking warmly to the old lawyer.

"The better the audience, the more severe the test."

"Certainly; but the more triumphant the victory too."

The band was playing when Kenneth returned to the box; so Doris knew why Scot made way for him so quietly, and why he only returned her smile, and did not speak. When the band had ceased, and the curtain was

slowly raised, Doris felt her heart beating hurriedly.

"I feel, Ken," she said, wondering at his unusual calm, "as if I were the author. Oh! how pretty!"

"Please don't credit me with the perfection of the scenery," requested Kenneth, when Scot, too, had leaned forward to speak of it, with his eyes upon the stage.

"Hush!" put in Doris, eagerly, as the play began. But she was wondering, even then, at the great calm which had fallen over Kenneth's intense excitement.

The first act went on quietly, scene after scene, with that want of interest inevitable among new characters; and when the curtain fell, it was only to an even, calm applause. As Scot said, in his prompt way, the attention was a greater compliment than the applause; but Doris wondered a good deal at the composure of the house.

"Kenneth," observed Mr. Bradford, for a few moments relaxing in his upright firmness, and turning towards his son, "that was a sleepy scene; you'd better have burnt it in manuscript. No, thank you—why should I want a pro-

gramme? Bless the lad! if you don't write to be understood, what's the use of writing at all?"

"I hear remarks here and there," said Colonel Egerton, cheerfully, as he came in from the next box. "I hear them talk of *latent power*, Ken, and *poetic ardour*, and——"

"Other quotations from the dictionary," added the old lawyer, calmly.

"Kenneth," whispered Doris, touching his hand, "please speak to me between the acts, or I shall forget you are here, and fancy it is you upon the stage."

He turned with a smile, but at that moment the band ceased. The interest rose now with each scene, until the curtain fell the second time, to a music of applause which gladdened Scot's heart, and brought the old lawyer's shaggy eyebrows lower over his dim eyes.

"This is a tribute to the actors," Kenneth said; but the words were unsteady, and ceased abruptly.

"I never was more surprised in my life!" cried Colonel Egerton, entering in his energetic unreserve, and bent, as before, on encouragement.

"I'm not surprised," confessed Scot, in his cordial way. "Are you, Miss Egerton?"

"Yes; but I'm not surprised that I'm surprised. I expected to be."

Colonel Egerton thought no longer of picking up stray remarks to make Doris rejoice. There was no further doubt about the general approbation; and it would not have been very hard to hear opinions which were uttered now with so much confidence.

"Graceful, yet so vigorous!"

"Has genuine dramatic strength, and—what is rarer still—dramatic spirit."

"Ardour of passion!"

"Intensity of sympathy!"

"True to nature, equally in its humour, its pathos, and its passion."

Such words passed to and fro now, uncontradicted, to the music of the band.

Presently the curtain rose once more, and from that time the whispers ceased, and the wonder grew with every line of the glowing, ardent verse. And now that utter silence of strong and deep emotion held all hearts, and Kenneth's ideal of pure success was realized. He sat very still beside Doris, Mr. Bradford near, his

arms tight in their old attitude, and his eyes fixed only on the stage ; while Miss Joan sat in an unusual nervousness, glancing from Kenneth to his father. And through all the theatre the wonder grew and grew, as this pictured life drew to its close. So that, when the last word was uttered, it was with one simultaneous impulse that the house rose, swayed by intense sympathy with those grand creations of the poet, which the actor's art had made so real. There had been outbursts of enthusiasm now and then through all the later scenes, but they were nothing compared with the acclamations which now rushed from the crowd as from one man ; there had been flowers showered on the stage before, but nothing like those rapidly flying trophies.

Doris too had risen from her seat, and Kenneth's flowers went whirling through the air, a willing tribute to one who had so well interpreted Kenneth's thoughts. Then she remembered the flower in her hair, and took that out and threw it too—but Kenneth's snowdrops were near her heart, and one of Scot's white roses waited for her at home.

The actors passed before the lowered curtain, but the shouts continued, and the call now

was for the author, while the people rose to stand upon their seats.

"They want you on the stage," said Scot, leaning forward to speak to Kenneth.

Kenneth looked down upon the stage, and then round upon the house; and it only seemed to Doris that he hesitated whether to go or not.

The calls were growing louder and louder for the author—while among them rang hearty and involuntary "Bravoes!"—when the manager of the theatre entered the author's box.

"They are calling you before the curtain, Mr. Bradford," he said; "and they mean it. Will you come? If not," he continued, with quiet tact, "they will be satisfied with your acknowledgment from here."

"That will be best, Kenneth," whispered Scot; and Kenneth, moving forward, bowed very gravely.

"Oh, Kenneth, do you see how they smile and wave their handkerchiefs?"

It was all Doris could say as, in her pride, she kept beside him, unconscious that the others had moved back, and were clustered behind them.

"A splendid success," the manager was saying now to Scot and Colonel Egerton; "almost unprecedented! There is not, as one may say, an order in the house, and yet witness this enthusiasm. Mr. Bradford must feel to-night the consciousness of a great victory. The actors have risen to his inspiration, and he has already shown himself a thorough master of his art."

Scarcely had Kenneth stepped back, when the calls were repeated, even more loudly than before. The excitement had been increased by the sight of the young poet, and the applause seemed literally to sway the building.

"They want you again," cried Colonel Egerton, his face a perfect picture of delight and pride.

Miss Joan stood against the side of the box, trembling in her proud excitement. But Mr. Bradford's head was quite turned away now, and the muscles strained in his folded arms.

"Once more," said Scot, his kind face very grave and anxious; as Kenneth stood at Doris's side, his eyes cleaving to her face. "Go once more, Bradford, or they will clamour on for ever. You—Surely *now* you feel the 'divine intoxication.'"

Slowly Kenneth went forward, but, instead of glancing round upon the waiting faces, he looked down upon the curtained stage.

At that moment Doctor Boyd, whose eyes had sought his friend's box, with a pleasant glance of congratulation, hurriedly apologised to the ladies near him, and passed from his seat; making a way for himself through the crowd, while those opinions which might have made Kenneth so proud were uttered frankly around him. But other whispers, too, now passed from mouth to mouth in the groups.

"What kept him?"

"Is it true that he is not sober?"

"What a public exposure!"

"Look at him!"

"Pity!"

"Our young successful dramatist has taken too much wine."

"One would have fancied that such a full draught of success had been sufficient—eh?"

Through the shouts and roar of applause there forced its way at last one long impressive "Hush!"

Then the waving handkerchiefs grew gradually quiet—and the physician was still far from the author's box.

"Dear Kenneth," whispered Doris, standing near him, "smile, and acknowledge this great welcome and approval."

"Where?" he asked, looking vaguely round the brilliant scene for a moment—looking past the hundreds of faces, pleased and curious; and then again fixing his eyes upon the stage—"Doris," he said—and his hand fell on hers just then with a grip which hurt her—"tell them to drop the curtain."

"Dear Kenneth," she said, most softly, "the play is over, and they are telling you how much they like it."

"Tell them," continued Kenneth, still with the dazed look down upon the drop-scene, "that those are not *my* words that they are saying now—those are not my thoughts. I—oh, these hurried lines are horrible to hear! Tell them to drop the curtain, in—in pity to me!"

"Oh, Kenneth," cried Doris, in a very passion of fear, as she followed that gaze of his upon the silent stage, "come away—my love!"

"I will come," he whispered, below his breath, "when they go. They should not be there so long. These words are not——"

"It was all exquisite," breathed Doris, very softly. "Come, Kenneth!"

"There"—with a long quivering breath—"that—is well. The curtain can fall—now—at last."

Then he moved his eyes to meet the clustering faces, and with a smile he bowed.

Doris was standing a little way behind him, waiting for him to turn; but, when he did so—his step uncertain and his hands lifted to feel his way—in an instant everything faded from her sight except his figure, and, in a sudden, overpowering fear, she clung to him.

It was at this moment that the physician entered the box, too gravely in earnest to utter any apology. In that one first glance he saw a picture which was to haunt him many and many a day—the young man with that strange smile upon his lips, as his eyes lost their hold upon Doris's face, and wandered far beyond the surrounding walls; and the girl clinging to him in her pretty dress, her face so sad and wistful in its agony, but so beautiful in its great tenderness.

He had seen it only for an instant, when he had his fingers round Kenneth's wrist, and had signed back the friends who were gathering with hearty compliments.

It was just as Mr. Bradford grasped his son's hand, moved as the old man never had been moved before, that the physician felt a strong convulsive shock run through a standing figure, and knew what it meant. Prompt and skilful he was, and ready for the great need which met him—but no thought, or skill, or tenderness could avail.

* * * * *

When, with gentle hands—and treading softly through that hushed crowd, waiting with bowed heads—they bore the young poet from the scene of his one triumph, he had still that dreamy smile upon his white, dead face.

CHAPTER XVII.

THAT Summer was wearing to its close, when one day, among the Kingswood hills, there gathered such a storm as had not been witnessed there for many years.

Margaret Chamberlain, dazzled by the yellow glare, had carried her book to the window, but could not see to read it even there; for the storm-cloud came quickly on, until it stood like an impenetrable wall before her. Presently it was pierced by a flash of vivid lightning; the silence, which had been growing heavier and more oppressive all the morning, was broken by a peal of thunder rolling slowly from the hills; and with a rush the rain came down, sweeping through the air like smoke, while the shrubs bent and swayed beneath it, and the clouds whirled above.

Margaret sat very still, in the stillness of an

intense suspense. Through an open doorway at the farther end of the long room, she could see Steven standing before one window in a smaller inner room ; and though she *seemed* to watch the storm, she was acutely aware of his every movement. His face was turned from her as he stood at the low window, but there was a quietness in his whole attitude which filled her heart with gratitude ; though every now and then, as he turned and restlessly paced the room, the old fear, which had become so habitual to her, made her heart beat rapidly. But when he had once or twice trodden the little room from end to end, he would return to his quiet watching of the storm, standing motionless before the window, and then Margaret would draw one long breath of heartfelt relief, and feel—as perhaps she had never felt before—more than a momentary lifting of that weight of fear under which her life had been passed.

Minute by minute the storm increased, but still Steven, after those brief fits of restlessness, would stand and look out upon it. The rain fell in torrents, the lightning flashed across the gloom, vividly and intensely blue, and the thunder pealed above the house, clap after clap,

in rapid succession. Then, for a few minutes, there would be a pause, and Margaret would listen to the ivy clattering against the wall. Then once more the slender flame would cut the gloom, and the long, rolling peal rise from its distant muttering into a near clash of terrible menace.

Once or twice Margaret nervously rose, as if she would have joined her brother, in her dread for him ; but a second thought always stayed her. Her presence might disturb him, and bring back all the old uneasiness which seemed to be stayed to-day, even in spite of this wonderful turmoil without. And was it not happiness enough for her, just now, to know that he made no effort to leave the house ; though she could not see his face, to judge how little or how much the tempest might have disturbed him ?

It had raged for more than an hour, and the hailstones clashed almost like bullets against the glass, when Steven's old servant-man came softly into the room, looking anxiously about him. Margaret, so well understanding the fear which was her own too, pointed to the inner room. The old man's eyes were dim, but he

could distinguish the standing figure, and he drew a long breath of relief.

"He has not attempted to go then, ma'am?" he whispered, approaching Miss Chamberlain.

"No."

"Thank God!"

"And yet the storm is so terrible," said Margaret, wondering, while both her fear and her great hope were visible upon her face.

Just as the old man left the room again, there was a ring at the outer bell. Margaret started nervously at the sound, then smiled at herself, as she wondered who could have ventured out in such weather—above all, who could have cared to venture here, where so few strangers ever came.

Just as she questioned this, Scot Monkton came in to her, straight from the storm. She met him with undisguised pleasure, not only the pleasure she felt in seeing him, but—though she was not aware of it—a subtle consciousness that she had a pleasure to give him.

"How good it is to see you, Scot," she said, as she put her hand into his. "From where have you come?"

"From home, Margaret, of course—from the

Black Birches. I could not rest in the storm until I knew that you were not suffering the old anxiety and fear. Tell me."

For all answer Margaret pointed with her hand to her brother's silent figure, standing far off, with his face turned to the storm.

"He has been quiet all through it," she said, in a whisper; "only walking now and then—still in that room; quiet even through such a tempest as this. Oh! Scot, have I not cause for gratitude to-day?"

"And has he been so?" asked Scot, speaking as quietly as she had done, "ever since my trial?"

"Yes; but he has never before been tested as to-day. My fear has been so great—so great, Scot—that I did not deserve this gladness."

"Then that day did him good instead of harm?"

"Yes."

"That is good to hear, indeed. Whenever that day rises in my memory—as it does so often—I will try to recall only that one happy result."

It was the mention of this day which made her look at him with such anxious scrutiny, and

they were its traces which she fancied that she saw upon his face.

"If he keep calm through such a storm as this," Scot said, breaking purposely this thought, which he could guess, "we need not fear again, Margaret. You lie so sheltered here, though, that you can scarcely realize the ruin the storm is working elsewhere. Across the rising ground there, the river sweeps through the valley with a deafening roar. It has carried away the wooden bridge below the Green Pits, and rushes like a torrent under the stone bridge in the park.

"Yet you came through it all, to help me once more," said Margaret, below her breath.

"I had a far more selfish reason. I came to set my own anxiety at rest about you both—not to mention that I also came to tell you how lucky it is that we have no corn this year, as it would have been totally destroyed; and that we have not repaired the house, for some of our windows are already shattered by the hail-stones. It is like standing under fire now at the Black Birches.

"But, Scot," asked Margaret, in astonishment, "why are you not at Kingswood?"

"Because," he answered, very quietly, "my little fellow would not have felt it to be home; and, as we only came for one day, it does not signify. Elizabeth had the house thoroughly comfortable, and as it used to be; and Liath's pleasure at seeing us was worth something. To-morrow Willy is going to make the acquaintance of his tenants, and so we must needs be at Kingswood then. He is to give a dinner to them, and they are to be introduced to their Squire. Poor little lad! I wish it were over."

"But you——"

"For his sake, I mean," Scot added, quietly. "He is so shy and nervous—so much more so than any healthy child of his age ought to be."

"But I am sure you will spare him everything to-morrow, save the pleasure of the day."

"Week after week we have delayed coming home for this—but now it must be done. You see we have only brought him the day before he need to be there, and we shall take him away again the day after."

"Where?" asked Margaret, feeling how real and earnest was Scot's anxiety over this child."

"We are to try Ventnor, but I daresay we shall go on to Madeira. Perhaps it will be

Summer-time of next year before we return, Margaret."

"I have——" She had been going to tell him how she had missed him, but she called back the words, for she would show nothing to-day in any light save a pleasant one. "I am so glad, Scot, that now I may thank you—hopefully, as I have never yet done—for your long, untiring help, and care of Steven; yet I cannot even now thank you as I ought. Seeing him as he is to-day makes my gratitude almost choke me."

"How about yourself, Margaret?" asked Scot, gently turning aside her thanks. "Are you lonely, now that your neighbours seem so scattered?"

"Loneliness is almost second nature to me," said Margaret, smiling, "and I have still one or two friends near."

"The Vicar and his wife pre-eminently."

"The Leveys are at Osborne House."

"So I suppose," said Scot, "quite understanding why she only mentioned their being there; but I'm sure Violet's marriage, and the preparation for her voyage to India, quite take up her time."

"Yes," said Margaret, smiling, "and Rose and her brother have never cared to call since—they knew our secret. But," she added, pleasantly, "why talk of them? Tell me, how is Miss Windish?"

"She it was who, most of all of us, wished to stay this time at the Black Birches," said Scot, laughing; "yet she groans over the appearance of the farm, and says of course Liath has grown childish, or he would not cling to it. I believe he will never leave it."

"Until it is pulled down," said Margaret, with a smile.

"Or falls."

"Mr. Bradford will be at Kingswood tomorrow, I suppose?" resumed Margaret, presently.

"Yes, he is always prompt and kind to come where he is needed."

"He has been very good to me," she said, her eyes brightening as she recalled the old man's kindness ever since that day when he had found out her secret, and she had promised to tell it for Scot's sake—a kindness which had never failed through his own sorrow.

"It is very sad to see him so changed now ;

yet he is, as he says himself, in harness still. Shrewd and skilful as ever, though somehow his deepest thoughts seem always resting undisturbed—with Kenneth."

"Mr. Bradford has been more than once to Florence to join the Egertons, has he not?"

"Yes, he goes backwards and forwards," replied Scot, with an added quietness in his voice. "Those visits, and his work, keep him as he is."

"He thinks of Doris Egerton quite as a daughter."

"Yes."

"We have lost her for a long, long time, I fear," said Margaret; "and you would hardly believe, Scot, how Steven misses her. But he does so enjoy hearing her letters. She writes to me very often now—it is only like her to do that—and such pretty, kind letters, remembering everything about us; remembering *us*, as it is plain to see, even in what she tells of herself, and of what she sees and hears. I—I cannot describe what I mean," said Margaret, thoughtfully; "and so you will not understand."

"I understand," Scot answered, with great

quietness, and added no other word of Doris.

He waited beside Margaret until the storm had lulled a little; then he went in to Steven, and roused him with a gentle touch upon his shoulder. In a nervous tremor, Margaret stood to watch the result of this; and when Steven turned and greeted Scot with his quiet dreamy smile, she covered her face a moment, in the very intensity of her joy.

For an hour Scot lingered with them, and Margaret rang for lunch, and made the rooms look homelike, and laughed and chatted as Scot had never seen her do before; and a lump rose in his throat as he watched her, and wondered would her life never hold a gladness for herself alone, and a joy which touched her own life, apart from its sacrifice for others.

When at last they had separated, and he had looked back from the gate to see the brother and sister standing side by side in the heavy porch, with a new look of peace upon their faces, he felt as if a cloud had been lifted from his own life too.

But there was no one to see this, and to wonder (as he had done of Margaret) if his life would ever hold a gladness which was for

himself alone, and a joy which touched his own life, apart from its sacrifice for others.

* * * * *

“Good gracious!”

It was Miss Michal's only exclamation when Scot came in, and Willy clung to him, regardless of dripping garments.

“All right, Aunt Michal; I agree with you heartily about ‘Good gracious!’—but then everything *is* good to-day.”

“You think so, do you?” questioned Miss Michal, with a mournful scepticism. “Well, I must say I don't. Who could, when they had been very nearly killed? Oh, it's all very well to look concerned now it's too late,” she added, growing visibly more cheerful when she saw Scot's swift glance of anxiety; “but you ought to have stayed at home to prevent it.”

“Could I have prevented it? What was it?”

“The—the—— Oh! Scot, it sounds so ominous, my dear, that I don't like to tell.”

“But you know it won't sound ominous to me,” the young man answered, with no further fear.

“The—the three black birches on the height

have all—fallen in the storm. Liath says they have snapped right off.”

“But you weren’t under them, Aunt Michal; and, even if I had stayed at home, they might have fallen just the same.”

“Really, Scot,” rejoined the little lady, pathetically, “you never will realise the full horror of some things. This is an awful spot!”

“Shall we go up to Kingswood at once, then?” questioned Scot, with a laugh in his eyes. “It is ready, you know; you have only to say the word, Aunt Michal.”

“Kingswood!”—she repeated the word with a faint shriek, and clasped her hands—“Kingswood! That shows how little you hear when you’re out by yourself. It’s awful to be left here to hear it. Scot” (Miss Michal’s round eyes grew rounder, and her limp little features were all pulled into an expression of great horror), “what do you think happened in the storm? Liath told me. A—a—a cloud burst.”

“So I should have fancied,” said Scot, coolly. “Were you frightened, Aunt Michal?”

“And,” she continued, dropping her voice still lower, with a glance at the child, but speaking in a peculiar whisper, which travelled

farther even than a raised tone, "it was over Kingswood—just over."

"And did it do any harm?"

"Harm!" echoed Miss Michal, grievously hurt by this view of the subject. "Of course not. What harm could it do to Kingswood? But—of course it means something."

"Oh, I see, Aunt Michal. Then suppose we take it to mean confusion to all clouds which try to settle over Kingswood—eh, Willy? Your home should be free enough from clouds, dear, if I could have my will."

CHAPTER XVIII.

IT was the early Summer of the following year, and the child, for whom so much had been done, and so many efforts made, still faded slowly day by day. Without a struggle or regret, even without much pain, he seemed gently and gradually halting in his little race; always weary, though, in his babyish bravery, he fought against this feeling as idleness or sleepiness. Often when the little head had dropped upon Scot's shoulder, and the tears fell slowly and silently, the reason which Scot won was—

“Because I'm such a trouble, and can't get wakeful.”

“My darling,” Scot would whisper, very tenderly, in his sad knowledge of what this meant, “we are never happier than when you are asleep.”

But yet he would so often look in vain for the wistful eyes to close, and the frail hands to slacken in their clinging hold about him !

"I hope," mused Miss Michal, in an awed whisper, as she sat and looked wonderingly into the small, white face, "I hope there are but few such child-lives spent among us."

This chill, dull evening, Miss Michal and the child sat alone at the closed window, where he leaned against the glass, gazing out dreamily upon the sea, which (from his first look upon it) had been one long wonder to him. The sky met it to-day in one universal grey, and only the boats, like dark specks dotting it here and there, told which was water.

A tearful, heavy-hearted evening, thought Miss Michal to herself, as she listened to the mournful, languid sweep of the waves upon the shore, and wished Scot would come back. Far off a band was playing, and Miss Michal noticed how still the child was until it ceased.

"Did you like it, dear?" she asked then, only for the purpose of breaking his silence."

"It's beautiful!" he answered, looking seriously up into her face. "Are those what the angels play?"

"I think, my dear," said Miss Michal, making the sudden discovery that her thoughts upon this subject were in some confusion—for with the old fancy of angels with their harps, struggled newer and more restive notions of their performing upon pianos; while among all these strayed a suggestive recollection of Jephtha's daughter beating a tambourine—"I think, my dear, that we had better not make up our minds about that; because we shall know it all in time."

"In a soon time."

But Miss Michal, looking on the little fading face, and finding she could not answer this question steadily, would not answer it at all, and felt greatly relieved that Scot chanced just then to return to the room.

"It was you the gentleman wanted after all, Aunt Michal."

"Me!" exclaimed Miss Michal, starting. "I thought you'd a letter by him from Mr. Bradford, and I thought the gentleman was Arthur Egerton's partner. Why do you say he wants me?"

"Because *he* said so, Aunt Michal," Scot answered, cheerfully, as he opened the door for

her. Don't be nervous: I just saw enough to know he is very pleasant; certainly he need not alarm you."

"I shan't stay," observed Miss Michal, as she passed him; and the words made him smile for a moment as he went up to the window to Willy, and took his old seat beside him.

"How they run! Will they soon be tired, d'you think?"

With Scot's arm about him, the child stood looking down at the children racing on the sands, pausing in groups to laugh and chatter, then flying on again towards the sea—looking wistfully and wonderingly, but with no shade of jealousy or discontent.

"Yes, they will be very tired to-night," Scot answered, promptly, his clasp tightening round his weary child.

"But not in Heaven?"

"Not in Heaven; no one is tired there, my darling."

"Won't that be nice?"

But for all answer Scot bent his face to touch the pale one lifted so earnestly to his, with that faint smile upon it which nothing ever brought now save his own words. Under the window

a yacht rocked slowly on the water, sailless, spiritless; and on the beach the waves broke with a hollow, dreary plash. The band had come nearer now, and while Scot listened—with a keen ear for all the instruments, though he fitted broken, meaningless words to the familiar air—the child was so silent that Scot fancied he had fallen asleep.

The tune was changed, and presently the band put up their instruments, and passed on. Slowly, in the grey sky above the sea, there opened a little cleft; and, from the sun behind, there fell a ray direct to the sea, making the waters sparkle where it touched them. Still sitting motionless, not to disturb his little lad, Scot watched it, only because it was the brightest spot in the grey scene; and, as he looked, the soft thin fingers of the child were lifted caressingly to his lips.

“Mustn’t it be beautiful where that comes from?”

“Not asleep?” questioned Scot, steadying his tones, and struggling to make them cheery, as they used to be when the child had first learned to love them.

“No, I’m not asleep, thank you. Are the

other children looking at it, and saying it's pretty?"

"Of course they are," said Scot, glancing hurriedly from the active children whom his child was watching.

"Do they want to go to Heaven?"

"See! There is a light already on the rock far out at sea."

No answer, and Scot lifted the thoughtful face with his hands.

"Willy, dear, what is it?"

"I want," said the child, simply, "to write my will, please. Don't you remember? You said, if I was rich—and I'm rich, aren't I?"

"Rich!"—Scot echoed the word sadly. Could the child be *rich*, and yet languish thus into his little grave, where riches were of no avail?

"I haven't written any copy for such a long time, have I?" asked Willy, guessing nothing of these thoughts. "I know I forget some letters; but you'll help me—you'll help my hand, won't you?"—with the old caressing touch.

"Never mind it quite yet," said Scot, huskily; "you shall write it some other day."

"But, please, I'd better now, if I might."

"Some day," said Scot, tenderly, "we will write them together ; because, you see, when you write your will, I must write mine, too."

"I want to give everything to you."

"And I want to give everything to you, dear, so let us both wait."

"Will it be soon enough?"

"Quite soon enough."

"Thank you," said the child, in his utter confidence, and lay so still and quiet then, that even when he fell asleep at last, Scot did not know it, until he had spoken to him, and missed the ready answer.

Then Scot laid him with tenderness upon the couch, and softly left the room. There was no sign upon his face of that sad look he had given the sleeping child, when he entered the room in which Miss Michal stood, gazing immovably at a stalwart figure near her.

"And so," said Scot, laying his hand upon the shoulder of this visitor, and speaking with a laughing cordiality, "this is Arthur Egerton's partner, Aunt Michal?"

"Scot," murmured Miss Michal, in a whisper of mingled pride and awe, "it's Luke."

"I should think it was, indeed," rejoined Scot, shaking Luke Hawthorne's hand for at least the fifth time since he had so unexpectedly found him alone in this room. "Who else could give us such a pleasant surprise, Aunt Michal?"

"No—one else," she answered plaintively, and slipped her hand back within her husband's arm, from which position she had rescued it hastily on Scot's approach.

"Luke himself, indeed," said Mr. Hawthorne, presently, when, with a certain bluff, frank fondness, he had given his little wife an encouraging caress, "come back for good and all, Michal; a more patient fellow, I trust."

"You were *not* very patient, Luke," the little lady answered, with a pensive air. "I've thought it over, and I know you were not very patient; but" (with a lively change of tone), "I've thought over other things, too, and I know I might have taken one or two things differently. I know how it was, Luke. I'd lived so easily, and so—so narrowly upon my cousin's generosity at Kingswood, that I'd never thought of marriage except as a pleasant change to give me the devotion of a husband

all to myself—and I'd plenty of time for the thought, too, for I was quite five-and-thirty when you proposed for me, as I believe you knew quite well—and I'd never thought of having my own share to do in making married life cheerful as well as endurable. I'd never thought of how there would come trials for us, as well as others. But I've thought more of it now, Luke. I've had leisure lately; and—I've seen more. But, Luke, my dear, let's keep together just at present. I—I think I should like Scot to see that happiness doesn't make me any worse."

"Or, rather," said Scot quietly, "she has a little charge upstairs, whom she is too kind to leave just yet, Hawthorne, because he would miss her sadly."

Of course, after that, Mr. Hawthorne had to hear the history of the child, and various other facts, to which he listened with much thought upon his healthy, sunburnt face, stroking the while his wife's silvery hair, with one broad hand which was burnt almost copper-coloured.

"I see," he said then, looking down with real pride upon her. "Then, if Monkton has no objection, I will wait here too. This house is

too grand for me just yet, because I haven't thrown off the habits of my mountain shed, but there's a square sort of hotel close by, which will do famously. "I declare," he added, with the very warmest accent of enjoyment, "it's the very best arrangement possible, and here's the finest sea I ever looked over—quite."

There was a lagging sense of honesty oppressing the "quite," which made Scot smile, but he understood the bluff generosity which prompted this arrangement, and though he did all he could to persuade Mr. Hawthorne to join them, he remembered him too well to believe he would change his mind.

"I shall be at large, you see," Luke Hawthorne said, waving his hand towards unlimited space, "and yet I shall feel amongst you again. And, if it's all the same to you, my dear," he added, with a frank kiss upon his wife's lips, "I would rather not lose sight of you again just yet."

"Egerton himself is in England, too, Monkton," he added presently, when their plans had been discussed. "Ah, I see you are glad of that. I suppose his father and sister will be delighted. He, too, has left America for good,

but he is a rich man. The mine we worked was his, you know; for he had bought the land. Michal"—with a rueful expression, which yet could not hide the merriment in his eyes—"it's a pity his partner could not get rich too, isn't it? It's rather too bad to ask you to come back to the old uncertainty, and occasional shortness of cash—eh, my dear?"

"If you say that again, Luke," asserted Miss Michal, with meek energy, "you'll make me miserable for life. I am sure you really had excuse to be cross with me—as you certainly were—because I bought unnecessary things when money ran short, and screwed you up in other ways; but I've a grain more sense now, as you'll see. Poverty doesn't—doesn't seem quite the same sort of affliction to me, Luke. I've learnt that—that a person can be cheerful, and compassionate, and—and even generous, even if poor. As I've learnt this, Luke," she added, turning to face him, with her hands in his, "I'm very glad you are poor."

"But as you've learnt that, my dear—as you say," returned her husband, his eyes full of mirth, as he shook both her hands energetically.

"I think you've learnt all you need. And so," he said, his cheery voice raised alarmingly, "we'll be rich."

"No, we won't, Luke," amended Miss Michal, with unusual liveliness, "because we can't."

"Yes, we will," he answered, stoutly, "because we must. Not rich, my dear!" he repeated, with a laugh. "Why, here I am with my wife back again, among my old friends, and you don't call me rich! Here I am with money enough to buy you any house in England, and you say I'm not rich!"

"You're joking," said Miss Michal, briskly.

"Not a bit of it, my dear. When I told you I was going to Mexico, as you remember, and you declined to come, and told me you had quite decided to go back to Kingswood alone, though we were three thousand miles away; of course I thought you were joking. Even when I found you gone, I thought it was only a *ruse* to frighten me out of my decision. When I discovered the truth of it, I—but never mind all that; we had tried each other's patience, and proved each other wanting. Let us never say a word of that again. I went to Mexico, and joined Captain Egerton. The mine was his, as

I said; but I worked my way into equal partnership; and—we are both come home again as rich as Job. Now, my dear, what do you think of that?”

What Miss Michal thought of that was apparently not to be known for an indefinite period; for the moment she had become fully aware of her husband's meaning, and his riches were an incontestable fact in her mind, she lifted up her voice and wept.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE sea was calm and bright next morning, as if other waters had taken the place of those which ebbed and flowed so heavily last night. The fishing-boats stood from the coast with sails spread, like a fleet in miniature. Young oarsmen, clad in white and crimson, pushed their boats down the pebbly beach to lusty shouts, and launched them gaily, with flags waving from the prows. The children frolicked with the tiny waves, which broke upon the beach in sweet, fresh music, like the wind in Summer beeches. The sparkle from each boat gleamed white as silver; the sails dipped white and spotless in the breeze; the waves, like tiny cataracts, fell and kissed the shore in creamy whiteness; the pebbly bank shone white as ruffled snow; the clouds that

sped across the blue were like the embodied sunlight; and far off one pure sail paused against the blue—all white, as if the world were still in childhood.

"Isn't it nice upon the sea?" asked Willy, dreamily, as he stood looking out upon this fair morning scene.

"Should you like to go, my darling?"

Scot spoke eagerly, because it seemed so sadly impossible to teach the child that what he wished for could be his; so impossible to win him from the touching humility which made him (so far from asking anything for himself) wistfully and earnestly grateful for the most trifling gift or care.

"Please—when you come. Will that little boat soon be in Heaven?—that white one, a long way off, sailing into the sky?"

"Listen!" cried Miss Michal, interposing hurriedly, with her finger raised; "listen, Willy! There's the band. Now you will be happy. I like it best staying there, a little way off—don't you, dear?"

"Yes, thank you," Willy answered, with his rare smile, grasping the window as he stood within Scot's arm, and guessing nothing, of

course, of how the band played especially for him, in this spot which Scot had chosen. "I'm so glad."

The band played on and on, and the little music-loving lad stood listening with a real happiness upon his face; while, beyond, the healthy children, who knew no weariness like this, ran out to chase the tiny waves, which laughed too, as they ran back into their safe retreat.

"Aren't those children merry?" breathed the child, softly. "Do they always play and run and laugh?"

"Not always," answered Scot, as he clasped his weary child closer. "If they did, they would be very tired, dear."

"I thought so; but you used to say it was right—and when I played with you I liked it. I wasn't so tired then. You used to get tired first, and wouldn't rest 'less I did. D' you remember?"

"They were grand games!" interposed Scot, cheerfully, though his eyes saddened as he mused how few weeks of real childhood his boy had known.

"And," said Willy, turning from his hold

upon the window to put his gentle arms about Scot's neck, "you used to lose all our races, didn't you?—'cept when I was on your back; and then"—with a gentle little laugh—"you'n me always beat Monarch—didn't we? But"—thoughtfully—"I never played before. Father said he was grown up, and he didn't laugh never—nor me. But he held me like you do; and when he didn't talk I felt him, and it was nice. If I could only find father——"

"Willy, my darling," Scot whispered, laying the little white cheek against his own, because he could not bear the piteous questioning of the puzzled eyes, "very soon you will feel your Father's arms about you, and they will never let you go again."

"Never?"

"Never."

"Then why," said Willy, bending his solemn little face to Miss Michal, with a mute caress from one little wasted hand, "are you crying? Shan't we *all* be happy there?"

"My dear," observed Miss Michal, briskly patting with one finger a spot of moisture which had fallen straight down upon her work, "this glare of sunshine dazzles my eyes until

they feel just exactly as if there were tears in them. They never were very strong; but such a day as this makes them quite—quite stupid, my dear; that's all."

The narrow boats shot through the water in a line, with their crimson ensigns flying. The children stood to watch them, clapping their hands and shouting in their glee, and the band played on.

"D'you remember," asked the child, breaking the long silence at last, as he looked up into Scot's face with wistful questioning, "when I found you in the train that day, and we had dinner—you'n me?"

"Such a delicious dinner."

"Yes—wasn't it? And then—and then," he added, with a struggle to remember, "you brought me home, didn't you? But father wasn't——"

"There was Liath," put in Miss Michal, with a gulp; "don't you remember Liath?"

"Oh! I remember Liath, thank you, quite—quite well. And it was so warm and kind, and you kissed me. Father didn't come, 'less it was so nice."

The racing boats were resting now, rising and

falling daintily upon the waves. The children sat in clusters on the beach, resting too, and the band ceased; but there was the tiny white sail still far away against the blue—pure as a child's spirit at Heaven's portal.

"When we go home," said Willy, "I shall tell Liath how I've 'joyed myself. He said I should—'course he knew, didn't he? Have you 'joyed yourself, auntie?"

Miss Michal made a huge effort to swallow; but, as she could not, she nodded briskly.

"And you?" he asked, laying one weak little hand upon Scot's face, so sad in spite of its great tenderness.

"I always 'joy myself when you do, my dear little fellow," Scot said, in his warm, loving tones.

"Do you?" Willy questioned, thoughtfully. "Then I've liked it—thank you. And we'll tell Liath. Are—Why," cried the child, starting up in a sudden shivering terror, "why—are you—going? Oh stay—oh hold me—please! Where's—father?"

"Coming, my darling," Scot whispered, kissing with an infinite tenderness the little raised, wan face.

"Is he? I'm so glad—only—don't loose me again, please. It's so nice when—when you hold me—thank you—so nice. Now—father!"

* * * * *

"Scot! Oh, Scot!" faltered Miss Michal, each word uttered in a gasp, "is he—is he——"

But, before Scot's gentle answer came, she knew the little one was safe now in his Father's care.

CHAPTER XX.

A SUMMER evening in Lucerne. The lake so calm and silvery—save where the green waters of the Reuss went rushing from it—that the boats in the offing floated doubly, keel to keel ; and the three narrow bridges—stretching like huge centipedes from shore to shore—were mirrored so clearly that one could fancy even the quaint old pictures which adorned their walls were painted there beneath the water too.

A wide, and rich, and tranquil scene it was, from the majestic summit of the Righi. Smaller lakes lay sparkling like gems, in their rich setting of mountains forest-tipped, and far away the glaciers of St. Gothard lifted their white faces to the sun. On the summit of the Righi a group of tourists stood and wondered, but a little English party, who had discovered for themselves a lovely spot below, were left to enjoy it

undisturbed—a party of only three ; all rather silent now, while in this wondrous scene Heaven seemed so near, and all of earth so pure.

Colonel Egerton, lying on his elbow in tranquil enjoyment, was idly pondering over the legend of Mount Pilate—because the mountain rose before him, rugged and mighty, with a cloud resting on its haunted lake. Who could have been the man who first decided that in this lake upon the mountain top Pontius Pilate had flung himself, in his unbearable remorse ; and that when any human being touched it, his spirit roused it to that wild tempest whose danger was so well known ? And then, who was it who had been bold enough one day to swim across it, and thus break the superstition which for centuries had left it untouched and shunned ?

Miss Joan, leaning back in her mountain chair, with a closed book in her lap, was following with her eyes a pilgrim troop descending from the confessional of Our Lady, where they had left their gifts and prayers.

But Doris, sitting very still, with her head against a giant pine, and her eyes upon the snowy summits far away, only sat and listened dreamily to the mellow notes of the Alpine

horns, as their distant signals rose from the bergs among the mountain pastures.

And as they sat there, quite silent in the unutterable calm of such a scene, the greeting of a familiar voice woke the silence into an embodied sound, and at a touch brought the vague journeying thoughts into that small scene of *home*, which yet, to each of us, is wider than the world.

Guided by one of their foreign servants, from the villa on the lake shore to which he had just arrived, Mr. Bradford had climbed to join them, and after their most glad and cordial greeting, he sat down among them, as if they had only parted the day before.

He had made several of these unannounced visits to them, during the fourteen months they had spent abroad, and now he hardly could come quite unexpectedly wherever they might be. Unlooked for he could scarcely join them now, even on the Righi; unwelcomed he could never join them anywhere.

"And so," he said, looking keenly at Doris, whose face told him so plainly of her real joy to see him, "you are eighty miles nearer home than when I saw you last."

"Are we?" asked Colonel Egerton, answering for his daughter. "We never thought of it, did we, Doris?"

His voice was light and cheery, yet Doris (so keen-sighted in her love) could read how this tone was assumed for her sake, and her thoughts grew fixed and steadfast just then, on a subject from which for long they had started and shrunk.

Home!

The old home which, crowded by memories, seemed to hold all her life, yet in which she had not really lived so long as she had lived among these foreign homes, which, however fair and tranquil, she could leave without regret. The old home to which Kenneth used to come, to seek her, in his joy or his anxiety. How different it would all be now! She must listen in vain for Kenneth's quiet voice and step, and she must long in vain for his gentle care and guidance.

Her thoughts touched no one else, in this regret which shadowed the picture of home; the thought of Kenneth was so tender and so sad that, while it ever lay so near her heart, she saw no thought behind it.

She had been selfish and thoughtless (so she mused to herself now, grasping the decision which she had shunned so long) she ought to have guessed that her father and aunt were hiding, for her sake, their longing to return.

So Doris felt, as she listened to the talk of home ; but this feeling was injustice to herself, for neither Colonel Egerton nor Miss Bradford had any longing to return, until she should wish it. Unless she were to be happier at home, they, in their love for her, could never be so ; and she, of course, could not know how, in her love for them, she made this life as bright for them as could be the life at home.

"Don't you think, papa," she said, when Mr. Bradford had told them on what day he must be back in England, "that we could go home then too?"

"Do you mean it, dear ? Do you wish it ?" he asked, frankly betraying his delight.

"Of course she means it," put in the old lawyer, perhaps seeing how much better it would be just then to take the fact for granted. "I'm an old traveller, my dear, and, all my life long, a journey has been a trifle to me ; yet, thank God, the coming home is the pleasantest part to me—even now."

"I am sure," said Doris—and from that moment no doubt ever rose again in her mind—"that I would like to go home with you."

"Then we will go," exclaimed Mr. Bradford. "I'll take the journey in your leisurely style. And now, what questions have you to ask me? I would not have you go home in ignorance of everything."

Miss Joan's questions came first, and Doris sat and listened, wondering all the time if it could be true that they were going home so soon—that in only a few days now she might be walking in the old avenue at Kingswood, where——

"I suppose Kingswood is open and occupied now, Bradford. It will be like old times to see the fine old country seat in all its beauty again."

"No, they have not returned from Ventnor yet; I told you they were there. Mr. Monkton has tried everything for that child. And as for Miss Windish, I should like you to see the one solitary letter she has ever written me. She wrote it on the night of her husband's return—I hope my telegram made you laugh when I sent you that news; it deserved to be borne by electricity, didn't it?"

"It was grand news," said the Colonel, heartily. "You can scarcely guess how we rejoiced over it."

"But her letter to me," continued the old lawyer, with a keen look into his friend's face, "related to her husband's partner. He, too, has returned from Mexico, a rich man."

"And you know him, I suppose?"

"I used to know him."

No further questioning, and for a little time there hovered among the group that silence, of thought and wonder, which is born upon the mountain peaks. Mr. Bradford, half lying on the grass, had rested his eyes upon the distant towers of the church at Stantz, while he saw more plainly still, just then, that English church where his son lay. But the memories of those sad partings, with which his life had been so filled, were calm and tender now to the old man upon whose working day the sunset light already rested.

And so in this great calm the minutes glided by. The tourists left the Righi Kulm, and halting at one of the little *châlets* scattered on the mountain side, merrily contested for draughts of warm new milk. The dazzling

whiteness of the snowy mountain-tops turned to purple, and the purple to deep rose tints. The floating sails upon the lake lay half in shade and half in sunshine, until the rays which touched each spire and pinnacle into a star, faded, as the stars fade at dawn.

In the tender evening light, the chanting of a stray pilgrim sounded hushed and solemn, and while the sheep-bells tinkled in the pastures, a mellower and more distant chime summoned the villagers to prayer.

"How strange," said Colonel Egerton, resuming the conversation when the hush had been rudely disturbed by the shrill cry of a bird of prey above; "was the discovery of that missing heir; or, as Scot Monkton himself calls the child, the little Squire of Kingswood."

"Strange and uncomfortable," assented Mr. Bradford, drily. "My agency was thrown into the shade. Scot Monkton's prompt, unhesitating kindness cut the Gordian knot, which no subtle handling (even of the law) could untie."

"It was a cruel legacy to leave to one so honourable and staunch. I have not forgiven the old Squire, even yet."

"Do you really think you haven't?" asked

Miss Joan, with a smile: "Remember he had the remorse to bear, and his son never had that. Besides, in his most troubled times, Scot has never fancied himself a martyr, making atonement for his father's faults. He just saw the course that was right; and, in his fearless, manly way, he kept to it; with no idea, I firmly believe, of what a brave and difficult course it was."

"But *we* know," said Doris, gently.

"Do we?" questioned the lawyer, with his old sharpness. "I doubt it."

"What's done, you know, Doris," put in her father, "we partly may compute, as Bobby Burns says; but we know not what's resisted."

"I've been mad with him many a time," said Mr. Bradford, presently; "but, after all, I suppose we seldom understand these things for each other. A man's conscience is his safest jury, perhaps, in a question of right and wrong."

"What about Stanley Monkton now? Do you know anything of him?"

"Nothing beyond the fact of his being back in Portugal, if not a sadder, certainly a wiser man—on the subject of English legislation. Now you have asked after everybody at Kings-

wood, Comely Place, Richmond, and Gordon Square, but you have all of you forgotten to enquire for the Leveys. Ever since Captain and Mrs. Gresford went to India with the regiment, young Levey and his sister have been abroad. They had lost nearly all the society of Osborne House, and therefore found it unbearable. The regiment gone, and you, and Monkton—what were they to do? What's that move for, Tom? We are to go, are we? You shouldn't spring up in that ridiculous manner, in my presence—but then no man ever possesses any feeling until he has had the gout."

"Doris, my dear," whispered Kenneth's father, as she clung to his arm on the mountain side, pretending she needed his support, "are you sure you wish to return with me? Much as I long to have you all at home, I would not urge it against your will."

"Ever since I knew we were going," said Doris, in whispered earnestness, "I have been happier."

CHAPTER XXI.

A YOUNG Englishman, in a fashionable tourist suit, and with a not too brilliant expression on his aquiline countenance as he studied his guide-book, lounged in the doorway of the hotel, making up his mind what it would be the correct thing to see, during the three days which he had understood that it was right to give to Zurich.

He bent over the pages in unwilling study. There was an arsenal—fancy going to see an arsenal when a man came abroad for peace! There was a library—fancy travelling hundreds of miles away from London to see libraries!

Mr. Levey's thoughts, not too firmly clinging about the historical associations of Zurich, found it easier, after all, to lounge in the scene around him. They touched, for an instant, the artist on the water side, engrossed in his sketch of

the donjon tower. They hovered, with just a feeble curiosity, among the pilgrims, landing on their return from a pious mission to Einsiedeln. They followed, with faint interest, an open carriage, full of pleasure-seekers, who talked gaily, and rather loudly, as they passed the hotel. Then, when these were out of sight, Bernard lighted a cigar, and attacked the guide-book again under that stimulant. What else was he ordered to see? Some spot where a fellow called Lavater was assassinated. Why on earth should English people go to see it? Weren't there plenty of spots in England where people had been murdered——

A diversion again. A travelling-carriage rolling up to the hotel door, and stopping within a few yards of Mr. Levey's inquiring eyes. Then the descent of a courier, hot and important.

The close proximity of a busy and excited fellow-creature was never relished by Mr. Levey, and he sauntered apart with his cigar. But it was not to be supposed that he could concentrate his interest, in its June languor, on a cluster of masculine students (taking their long pipes from their mouths to free a passage for

their fatiguing laughter), when perhaps, in the carriage behind him, there might be feminine students, who would value the advice and assistance of an English aristocrat who was *au fait* in travelling, and could tell them all the best things to see in Zurich.

Pocketing his guide-book, and throwing aside his cigar, he strolled forward again, and watched the party leave the carriage, one by one. A gentleman, tall, grey-haired, and soldierly; another gentleman, elderly too, but with keen young eyes under the shaggy grey eyebrows; a gentle, white-haired lady, in a mourning dress, and a fair-haired girl, in deeper mourning still.

Bernard had known each one, but it was not until Doris alighted that he came forward, welcoming them all to Zurich, as if it were a little private corner of his own property, and their visit to it was a delicate personal compliment to himself.

It had never been the very easiest thing in the world to get rid of Mr. Levey after he had once attached himself. He had a general idea that it was a great addition to the enjoyment of anyone to share his society, and he had to-

day a very particular idea that it was a great addition to Doris's pleasure to have the companionship of an experienced and suitably-attired tourist, who had money to do the thing handsomely, and who, being such an old acquaintance, had a hundred interests in common with her.

"How tired she must be of the old fogies and the old maid! Poor girl, I shall certainly consider it my duty to give her all my time while we are in Zurich."

So he told his sister, when he joined her to tell of the arrival of Colonel Egerton's party; and when Miss Levey, without the least change of expression, laid down her novel and listened.

"You look excited," she remarked, chillily. "What is there to excite you?"

"Oh, I'm glad to see—to see them all again, of course," replied Bernard, moving his face from the range of his sister's straight, cold gaze; and then, of course, you know I feel how glad they must have been to find *me* here."

"Are they changed?"

"Changed? I didn't notice. But now you mention it, I think they are. The old lawyer is improved a little; he doesn't *quite* cut one's

nose off every time he speaks ; he's unfeeling, though, still, for when I mentioned his son's name he made the iciest remark—and on quite another subject."

"I daresay," rejoined Rose, superciliously. "What about the others?"

"The Colonel's just the same ; but Miss Bradford's hair seems whiter."

"And Doris Egerton?"

The tone was one of intense indifference, burdened by mental fatigue.

"I haven't decided yet. At first I thought she was immensely changed, and afterwards she seemed just the same. At any rate, if she is changed," added Mr. Levey, briskly, "it is not for the worse."

"Of course not," returned his sister, with a slow smile. "No girl of nineteen would be broken-hearted, or embittered, because—more than a year ago—she had lost a brother, however dear."

"A brother!" echoed Bernard, turning again to face his sister.

Rose's smile widened a little, much to his surprise, for it was but seldom now that she cared to exhibit her share of the dazzling white

teeth in which the family took such pride.

"You don't understand," she said, coldly.

"But do you positively believe she only frets for Kenneth Bradford as she would have done for a brother?"

"*You* couldn't put my meaning into words, if you tried for an hour," she said, taking up her volume again. "You had better leave those subtle distinctions to us women."

"But if you mean what you seem to mean," resumed Bernard, anxiously, "it won't be too soon if I ask her——"

A laugh, harsh and unpleasant, interrupted him. "The truth of what *I* refer to, cannot affect *you* any way," Rose said. "If you are fond of mortifications, try it."

"You must think I'm very fond of *your* mortifications," rejoined Bernard, sulkily, "for you give me plenty. I wish I knew what in the world is the matter with you, Rose. You seem to care for nothing."

"At any rate," was the chill reply, "I care for myself, and I want to rest until dinner-time."

"We are going for a sail to-night; it will be moonlight," said Mr. Levey, pausing before he

left the room. "You will come, Rose?"

"No."

"Not if Count Vehrens joins us? I think he's smitten a little; and you know you think so too. Perhaps in the moonlight he might propose."

"That will do, Bernard," interposed his sister, rising tardily. "If Count Vehrens felt inclined to propose to—any one, gaslight would be as agreeable to him as moonlight. Don't let your brotherly solicitude suffer for me. I have every intention of accepting Count Vehrens when he offers; but—there is no hurry."

Left alone, Rose put down the volume which she had opened to hasten her brother's departure, and rose and paced the room, just as she had paced her dressing-room on the night she wrote that last letter to Scot Monkton. Long ago she had destroyed his answering letter, but its words—so pleasant, though so few—were remembered as distinctly as she remembered her own long-meditated sentences. Sometimes even now the shame of it all rose up and touched her cheeks to fire; but her mortification was in the defeat of her plans, and the disappointment of that passion (or ambition) which she

still called love. True, it had been the strongest feeling which her nature had ever known; but when, on its weak foundations, it tottered and fell, the selfish nature had closed above the gap, and left itself only a little narrower than before. It was but rarely that, as now, that taunting recollection faced her in the corridors of memory—rarely, because her life and Scot's were necessarily far apart during his wanderings—but when it *did* come, it was always with this stinging sense of injury and resentment, which tintured her life with bitterness, and could not yet hallow it by sorrow or regret.

While she had listened to her brother, she had determined in her own mind not to betray to these home-returning friends any glimpse of disappointment; but, on the contrary, to convince them how much she enjoyed this foreign tour. So when she took her place at the *table d'hôte*, the frigid indifference to which her brother had grown accustomed, had deserted her, and the fragile little Suabian Count beside her grew dumb with astonishment at an added charm in a lady whom he had elected to admire.

That an English girl of such a height, with such teeth and hair, and with twenty thousand

pounds of her own, should be able to jest in two languages, and make herself smile so constantly, was a lesson to him. He must waste no more time. How she would adorn the hereditary Schloss—well, scarcely that, considering that it was at present mingling its ashes with its mother earth; but how well she would suit his gorgeous Paris hotel!

"Yes, I felt bound to come," said Rose, as she and Doris went to prepare for the night-sail upon the lake. "Count Vehrens would have stayed with me if I had declined to go. Isn't it tiresome for me to have him so thoroughly devoted to me? I'm sure my friends at home will pity me when you tell them about it. Yet he is very rich, and has a theatre of his own in Paris, and he is of very high birth."

"He is not of very high stature," said Doris, the corners of her mouth puckered a little, as she read the intention which Miss Levey fancied she had veiled so cleverly. "When I first saw him I thought he was a little boy in a dress-coat. But of course that doesn't signify."

"Of course not," assented Miss Levey, promptly, "when he is so distinguished. I daresay people to whom you mention his name at home,

will know him—Mr. Monkton, for instance. Would you send me word if he does?"

"Yes," said Doris, in sudden quietness, "if Mr. Monkton mentions Count Vehrens, I will send you word."

"Thanks, so much; it's a promise remember. I'm sure he—Mr. Monkton, I mean—will be highly amused when you tell him of the Count's devotion to me. I really never saw anything like it before. Men so seldom now-a-days bestow affection upon anyone. This is my room—I shall only be one minute."

No one but Bernard Levey himself ever quite understood how it happened that he was at last left for a few minutes alone with Doris. In the boat she had sat at her father's side, and when—at Bernard's instigation—they landed at Richterschwyl, she had linked her arm in Mr. Bradford's, and strolled with him. Yet Bernard's persistence, for all its frequent defeats, was to grasp its reward at last; and he alone could ever have explained the series of diplomatic moves which he had found necessary for the result.

He had brought her to a little natural terrace on the lake shore, where he had told her—there

was little fear of a mistake in his rash guess—that the view was magnificent; and she stood looking upon it, every feeling harmonized to the fair, tranquil beauty of the scene.

Above the summits of the Eastern hills, the moon rode unclouded; and across the lake sparkled a line of silvery light; above the shore—with its wealth of vineyards, and groves, and orchards, and calm stretch of meadow and corn-fields, dotted with nestling cottages and snowy villas—swelled the vine-clad hills, behind which rose the mountains, whose majestic forests no moonlight could do more than touch. And further still, and higher, the Alps towered into the moonlit sky, with a faint changing flush upon their whiteness.

“Is it not beautiful, Miss Egerton?”

She did not answer; and he was scarcely surprised. His eyes had not been upon the scene before him as he asked the question, for Doris, standing there so still, her hands locked before her, and that far-away thought in her face, was more beautiful in his eyes than that wonderful night-scene which had filled her heart with awe and reverence.

But she would surely break her silence pre-

sently, and so, though of course he had not too much time to spare, Bernard thought he would wait a few minutes.

Softly and musically, now and then, came the rippling of oars in the water, as a boat would skim across the silver line, light and bright for a moment, then pass on into the darkness, while the sound faded. Now and then the bay-ing of a house-dog reached them from the opposite shore, and now and then the faint notes of a harp came from a cottage near.

"Miss Egerton," said Bernard, at last, his patience gone, "I believe you forget that I am here."

She turned her eyes at once, the long thought (so sweet even in its sadness) had fallen at his words, as a bird falls when wounded in its flight.

"Yes, I had forgotten where we were," she said, gently.

"I wish you had not," complained Bernard, with pathos; "I could never forget that I was at your side."

"I will not forget again," said Doris, taking one last look before she turned.

Against the background of rich moonlit leaves,

with the shadowy pine forests overhanging her far above (while countless fragrant flower-scents elung about her), she looked so pretty and so calm, that Bernard forgot the old scene in the library at home, and took in his, the one hand she dropped beside her.

"Doris," he whispered—and for that instant even *his* placid voice was stirred—"let us never forget each other again; let us never part again. I love you more than I ever did; and you know I always loved you better than anybody else—don't you?"

"Mr. Levey," said Doris, looking into his face with simple, grave surprise, as she drew away her hand, "I answered you this question a long time ago."

"But since then——"

"Since then," she said, interrupting him, with a shiver, "nothing has made me change my feeling for you; and I am sure that nothing ever will."

"But it was because you were engaged that you refused me then," persisted Mr. Levey, in real and helpless astonishment at this sudden dissolving of the hope which he had placidly encouraged ever since Kenneth Bradford's

death; you said so—don't you remember?"

"I remember *everything*," said Doris, in her low, clear voice; "and I never thought you would speak to me of this again. I am very, very sorry," she added, gently, while a strange, undefined sympathy crept into her tones, and prompted her to offer him her hand. "I should have been so glad to have prevented your—your caring for me in vain."

"Perhaps," said Bernard, eagerly, the sympathy and the sorrow too subtle for his comprehension, "you will feel differently—when——"

"If we are ever to be friends at all," said Doris, speaking very firmly now, in her consciousness that Bernard would only understand the plainest negative, "you must never ask me this question again, Mr. Levey. I could never give you a different answer—and why should we weary each other with the subject? That's papa's voice. Will you call an answer, please?"

But she was too kind to hasten from him, even though the excuse was ready; and so they came up to the party, side by side, and only Rose could read the whole truth in her brother's sullen depression during their return.

"I shall be very glad to follow you to

England," he said, ruefully, to Doris, as they landed in the "noon of night"; "I would rather be at Osborne House than here."

"Wait till you see the Zurich library," said Doris, gravely.

CHAPTER XXII.

“HOME again, Doris!”
“Yes—home again, papa.”

To Doris, as she drove along the familiar road in the early Summer evening, it seemed as if those wonderful scenes in which she had so lately lived had belonged only to a dream, and she had wakened now all the more keenly to feel her sorrow.

It was but natural she should fancy it so, in these first hours of her return to the home in which Kenneth's presence was so familiar, and while her thoughts rested on him.

“Yes, home again, papa,” she said, answering as cheerfully as she could. “Aunt Joan, are you glad?”

“I don't intend,” said Miss Joan, with a great appearance of determination, as she laid her hand gently on Doris's, “ever again to travel farther than Charing Cross.”

"Why, auntie," whispered Doris, softly, "what would you not do for those you love?"

"What do you mean, my dear? Do you fancy I went abroad to please anybody except myself?"

"Oh no," smiled Doris, with a kiss; "but I know how you best like to please yourself."

Mr. Bradford had, all through the drive, been sitting quite silent in his corner of the carriage; but now that they were in sight of home he roused himself; and who could guess, by his quick words, how full his heart was?

"Well, here we all are—the young folks who revelled in mountains, and the old fogey who longed for the London streets."

"If it does you good to abuse the well-meaning old lawyer with whom you've been in the habit of travelling all your life," remarked Colonel Egerton, as they alighted at their own door, "why, I've no objection to your laying on, Macduff, to your heart's content."

That evening, in the quiet sunset time, while the excitement of the home-coming still distracted everyone indoors, Doris slipped away alone; not through the shrubbery and down the larch meadows, along the path which had

grown so familiar to her, but through the lawn, and out into the park.

She had her hands full of white roses and azaleas, and she walked on rapidly, towards the church beyond the great, silent, empty house. The trees were in their richest Summer beauty, and all around her Doris felt the hush of a delicious peace. Her steps slackened, unconsciously to herself, as her thoughts dwelt on what Kenneth had said of this scene one day when he came from his London rooms; and again rose that intense longing that others, who worked as he did, should now and then enjoy this pure, sweet, country air as he enjoyed it.

The light was fading when she reached the churchyard, but the gate was open, and she passed in and laid her spotless flowers on Kenneth's grave. Then she took back one white rosebud for herself (because it had lain there), and kissed it and held it tenderly. And the light faded very softly as she knelt.

The Rector's gardener, coming along the gravelled path, with heavy grating tread, started a little in the gloaming when the girl rose to her feet at his approach; but seeing

who it was, he paused, and would have turned, but that she spoke to him.

He had only come round to lock the gate, he told her, as she stood, with a last look upon the grave, recalling that day when she and Kenneth had lingered in this very spot, and spoken of its restfulness. And when——”

“Can you tell me,” she said, speaking rather hurriedly—for there were some thoughts she dared not touch, because they scared her, even now that the past was softened to a calm and tender memory—“can you tell me who lies in this little new grave beside me?”

Yes; that new grave, the man told her, speaking quietly, was a child's. The grave of Mr. Monkton's child, who'd been called the little Squire of Kingswood.

Then the man turned away, for Doris had knelt beside this little mound of turf, and laid there the one white rosebud which she had taken from Kenneth's grave and kissed.

Though the dusk deepened so rapidly among the trees in the park, Doris still walked homewards very slowly, a quiet, thoughtful figure in her mourning dress, so small and solitary amid the giant trees.

As she passed under the walls of the closed house, in the heavy shadow, her step slow and her face bent in her deep thought, Scot Monkton met her. He too was walking thoughtfully in the dying light, clad in mourning as she was; and, though he quickly smiled to greet her, there was something in his face which, through all his struggles, she had never seen before.

He was alone, and he, too, had lost some one whom he loved. So, quite simply and naturally, while her eyes were raised to his face in sympathy for a sorrow *she* had known, she held out both her hands, and left them in his close, warm clasp.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN the twilight of a September evening Miss Joan sat in an idleness which was as unusual with her as was the restless solicitude of her thoughts. Looking absently before her, as she lay back in her easy-chair, she pictured, vaguely and anxiously, a future which might be in store for Doris. Now and then before her eyes rose Kingswood, a beautiful home, where Scot and Doris lived in an atmosphere of love and felicity. She saw Scot nobly filling his high place, and Doris a sweet, happy wife and mother. She saw a crowd of children, making the grand old house into a perfect home, with their caresses, and their love, and their merriment. There was a little Scot, sturdy, and brave, and chivalrous, but with no stern duty awaiting him in the life to come; and there was a shy-eyed girl with sunny hair, who had the fairy brightness she remembered in her own

Doris years ago. There was a gentle, studious, little fellow, who bent above the books he loved so well, but who had constantly to close and leave them, at that loving call for "Kenneth." There was a tiny Margaret, the "Daisy" of the house, who did not know what loneliness could mean ; and there was an infant in the mother's arms, revelling in caresses, while he bore the name of that little one who had known no watched and cherished babyhood.

But now and then over the picture there spread a vague, dim cloud. In fancy now Miss Joan saw Scot alone at Kingswood—doing his duty still, but worn, and grave, and solitary, while Doris, a pale and silent woman, walked on her way alone, until one day when they laid her near Kenneth in that quiet churchyard in the park.

Miss Bradford roused herself with a shudder, and took up her work, determined to think no more. But our thoughts are subject to no word of command, and hers was still skirmishing where they would on this debatable land, when Colonel Egerton entered the room, and laughed to meet her absent gaze.

"Dreaming, Joan?"

"Day-dreaming, yes," she said, with her gentle smile. "Dreaming a future for Doris. How I wish that she would decide it for herself!"

"So she will in time," the Colonel answered, cheerily. "It is three months already since Scot told her of his love, and I'm sure she can see how dear she is to him. Trust me, his straightforward, manly wooing will win her."

"If I felt sure she would say 'yes' at last."

"Do you really think that she cannot learn to love him?"

"If I did," replied Miss Joan, smiling, "I should not be harassed with this uncertainty. Don't you know that we often shrink from a happiness which we know has been denied to one we loved?—but all the better, Tom, if you cannot understand me."

"I know one thing," said the Colonel, earnestly, "that to no one else could we give our child so willingly—eh, Joan?"

"To no one, indeed."

"And Bradford is as anxious as we are. He loves very deeply—though so undemonstratively—where he loves at all, and for a long time Scot Monkton has been very near his

heart. As for Doris, she has always been nearly as much his child as my own. By the way, Joan, will you come with me to the station? I have a fancy Bradford will be down to-night, and the drive will do us no harm, even if he is not."

"Where is Doris?"

"She set out with Arthur to walk to Comely Place, an hour ago."

"Isn't it delightful, Tom, to have Arthur among us once more?"

She had no need of any answer beyond the intense gladness of his smile; and while they were on their way to the village station she listened, in pleasure equal to his own, to his proud, loving mention of his son. But as they passed Kingswood, Colonel Egerton drove slowly.

"How beautiful Monkton is making the house and grounds!" he said. "I suppose his wish personally to overlook the improvements is his real reason for staying on at the Black Birches."

"I doubt it," answered Miss Joan. "I believe he is hoping to go back—with Doris."

"He deserves a smooth and happy life here

now. Though I doubt," added the Colonel, with a laugh, "whether his life can *ever* be really smooth anywhere—I mean in Bernard Levey's acceptation of the term."

* * * * *

Colonel Egerton had been mistaken when he said that Doris had gone with her brother to Comely Place. She had only walked down the garden with him, and they had parted at the shrubbery gate. So when she returned to the house she found herself alone. But of course her father and Aunt Joan would return soon; they would only have gone to take a stroll in the gloaming. She would wait at the window, then she could join them when they came in sight.—No, she would not watch at all.

She laughed at herself as she turned away. It seemed so curious to be changing her mind about a thing which signified so little. She sat down to the piano and began to play, softly and dreamily, as if the music were but the voice of her own thoughts; and while she played, some one came in to her, whose very presence in the silence (even before he spoke) made her heart beat, and her hands fail at their task.

"Do you know, I think, Mr. Monkton," said Doris, striving after her vanishing ease, "that on the very first evening I spent at the Black Birches I played this very *Lied* into which I had fallen."

"Yes; I recognised it in a moment."

"I did not—at least, I did not recollect it until I saw you."

She had risen now, but stood before the piano, very pretty in the fair September twilight, and looking very calm, though she was struggling with a nervous new timidity.

"Papa is out, Mr. Monkton; but in a few minutes I think——"

"I came to see *you*, Miss Egerton," said Scot, standing opposite her against the table, for after his greeting he had moved back from the piano. "I came to ask you if you forget that it is three months since you promised that 'in a month or two' you would give me an answer to my entreaty."

"I had not forgotten; but——"

"I know," he went on, in her pause, speaking quite calmly in the strain he put upon himself (which even such long practice had not made it easy to put) "that I might wait pa-

tiently for many more months, and even years—as I shall wait, Doris, if you bid me—but I want you to tell me if there is hope that you will *in time* accept my love, and be my wife. And I want”—his face had been very grave in its great earnestness, but an added sadness fell upon it now—“to tell you that, if you feel there is no hope, you have no need to hide the truth from me in your compassion. It will be easier for me to part with my hope now, than it can be when hope has grown into a familiar friend. This evening I have come once more to offer you my love—the first and only love of my manhood; I will not say how strong and firm it is, because that can make no difference now in your own feeling. If my persistence pain you, Doris, tell me now. If you cannot feel that you would be happy if you gave your life to me, then say good-bye, dear friend, and I will go and try to get accustomed to a solitude where your dear voice and face will be but memories. If”—the words were very low, but every one was clearly uttered—“if you would rather that I never urged again this earnest suit of mine, then tell me so to-night, and I will go.”

He held his right hand towards her, perhaps to help her in this parting scene, perhaps in the longing to touch the small clasped fingers; but she looked from it straight up into his face—questioningly, even wistfully.

“I do not know what answer would be best.”

“Not know?” he answered, speaking very calmly, because all his thoughts were brave, and all his passion under control. “It is a very simple question, after all. If you feel that you can never think of me but as an old friend, the answer to my prayer is but a simple one for you to utter. Do you wish to say it, Doris?”

In his chivalry he tried to help her, even in dealing him this blow, but she could read his face so plainly now that no command he put upon himself could hide what his heart held of love and longing.

“But if you feel that you can love me, perhaps some time——”

“Oh! Scot, I—love you—now!”

The words had come softly from her lips, unchecked, and she stretched both her hands to him, as once before, in the grave Summer twilight, she had sought his clasp and comfort in her own sorrow, and offered him her own the while.

Before her face bent from his sight she had read the intensity of his gratitude, and seen that tide of joy which swept, like a wave of sunlight, over this manly courage which had been his armour.

"Then, my beloved, he whispered, his voice shaken in this moment of utter content, "give me my answer."

His arms were round her, and his glad, brave face was bent to hers. She had but to lift her eyes—bright in their joy and innocence, and steadfast in their love and trust—to his, and the answer was given.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE beauty of the day was matchless, as are those rare Autumn hours when the grave elder sister of the Summer puts forth her riper charms for a brief rivalry.

Clear and marked against the purple sky, on the summit of one plot of verdant rising ground, just beyond the Kingswood boundaries, rose a long, low building, from which, in the bright sunshine, waved a flag at either end, bearing no English emblem, but the gay one of the stars and stripes. This long, imposing structure was the model house and farm which Luke Hawthorne had built, himself overlooking and helping in the work, and living the while in the moveable wooden dwelling which Miss Michal—the old name still slips out—had grown to think home indeed. And the signals were displayed upon that Autumn day, to show that the great work was finished.

So old friends, looking up to see these waving emblems, smiled with real pleasure, and started for the spot, because it was an old promise that all Luke Hawthorne's friends should go up and wish him joy, when the last touch had been given.

From Comely Place the flags were not visible, but that signified little, for no sooner had they been seen from the Dower House than Arthur Egerton rode off to tell Margaret. She heard his horse's step upon the gravel, and told Steven so; and then, as her brother went to meet him, she stood waiting, her calm eyes very bright and glad.

"Margaret," said Captain Egerton, as he came gaily in, "Steven has gone to order your horses. Are you ready for a ride?"

"I am always ready when you come."

He was a grave, stern-looking man, his hair thickly silvered, and his shoulders bent—as old-looking as his father—but when he spoke or listened to Margaret his face wore a vigour and a tenderness which brought back his lost youth.

"And I am always coming, am I not, Margaret? You have power over me, dear, for everything except to keep me away from you

any longer. I have accepted now, from your own lips, the fate against which I rebelled so surlily twelve years ago, but I will have my own way too, and make you my care. Say, is not happiness possible to two dear friends, although they do not wed? I shall live near you always now, and we are old, old friends. I was thinking only this morning, dear, as I rode along—reminded, I suppose, by Hawthorne's completed work—that you and I must plan some outlay for all my wealth. We shall have no one to inherit it, and so why should we not use it for all the good we can?"

"But you will——"

"Now, Margaret," he interrupted, gravely, "you know quite well that what you are going to say is not true. If it had been possible that any one *could* have taken your place in my heart, it would have been taken while I thought you cold and heartless. My love, could you imagine it possible now, when I know you have loved me, and when you have even told me yourself that my friendship makes your life a little less—grey and solitary?"

"Grey and solitary?" echoed Margaret, the glad tears rushing to her eyes. "Why, Arthur,

I can hardly yet believe in the great happiness of seeing you sometimes, and knowing that you do not think me hard and unfeeling and ungrateful. That this should be through my telling my secret, and that I should have struggled so long against telling it! Do you wonder, Arthur, that I cannot believe it, even yet?"

"Indeed, I don't, as you evidently considered yours was to be a life with *no* happiness."

"I could never tell you what it is to feel I have your friendship now, and your sympathy, and your care."

"And pray who else," questioned Captain Egerton, trying to make his own words very light, "should be my care? My father is far too thorough an old soldier to deign acceptance of any; Aunt Joan has everybody's. Doris, you must own, has sufficient lavished upon her. And as for Mr. Bradford," laughed Arthur, "neither Scot nor Doris allows an opportunity for anyone else to bestow any care upon *him*."

"I see," said Margaret, laughing, in spite of her wet eyes. "But you haven't mentioned Steven."

"Steven needs so little now," returned Arthur, lightly. "Besides, I can never recall my lost time, and rival Scot or Doris—but remember I do not want to do so, Margaret. The way in which I want to make up for my lost time is in my effort to lighten *your* perplexities and troubles. In the meantime my own perplexity is, why you caused that lost time? Ah, Margaret, you should have told me the truth at once. I never shall quite understand why you did not."

"I think you do already," she said, with a smile. "You would have——We were younger then," she added, breaking off gently. "In any case life would have been the same for you, and that time has done me good. Then think how it has made me appreciate the dear friends I have now. Arthur," she added, looking earnestly into his face, "you can never guess the difference there is in my life, now that I do not bear alone that secret fear."

"I can see a difference, dear," he said, "since I came back to you, more than a year ago; but you are to me just the Margaret of eighteen, whom I first learnt to love. There comes Steven. How quiet he is always, and how happy, Margaret!"

"And does he not owe that to you, Arthur?"

"So much more to Scot, though, and to Doris—and we cannot even say, as Mrs. Hawthorne does, 'that's all,' for chief of all has been his sister's life-long care and gentle company. Now here are the horses."

Riding was a new pleasure to Margaret, one of those which her old friend had taught her—though Steven had been long ago tempted by Scot Monkton, and had only left off riding when Scot had been unable to lend him a horse which he could trust, and to ride with him, as he had so often done from Kingswood—and to both the brother and sister this new enjoyment was one of their greatest.

"I am so glad Mr. and Mrs. Hawthorne have such a beautiful day," said Margaret, uttering aloud the continuation of a thought, as they turned from the highroad into the park, and rode down the larch meadows to the river path opposite where the Black Birches once had stood.

"I don't believe the completion of his model building means quite a festival for Hawthorne," laughed Arthur Egerton. "I am sure the daily

inspection—and above all his own manual part—has been the most supreme enjoyment to him.”

“I’m sure it has; but then he will have so much to do there still. You have just as much enjoyed helping him too, haven’t you?”

“Yes, it has been a capital idea altogether, and capitally carried out. He and I should have missed our old hard work, if we had had nothing to graduate us to idleness; and then it has been such an amusement too, and I should think our laughter from that spot must sometimes have astonished the quiet country folk. Hawthorne has been such a pleasant tyrant over his work—such a hearty, cordial blusterer—and so amusingly staunch to his own opinions, while he invariably *consulted* us; frankly acknowledging to me that Monkton’s skill in matters of farming (and knowledge of horses and cattle generally) was far superior to mine, and just as graciously confessing to Monkton that my practical powers with a pick and saw were enormous. And beyond that, Margaret, his confidence in his wife’s taste and skill, in her special departments, is unlimited, and a famous sight.”

"All have had a hand in the house, or farm, or gardens, haven't they?"

"Everybody," assented Arthur, laughing. "It has been a regular game for us all, and I suppose that is why it has taken so long. But at any rate, we are all to have the pleasure of seeing our work complete to-day, and the little wooden engineering house carried off—I believe verily that Mrs. Hawthorne will regret that. She has been thoroughly happy in it, in spite of a few efforts after what I fancy must once have been an almost chronic dejection—efforts which Hawthorne seems to know exactly how to treat. She smiles now at any idea of another separation between them, but sometimes—in a moment of unusual content—she still likes to indulge in a few tears."

"I often think," said Margaret, presently, "how strange it was for you to meet with Mr. Hawthorne."

"Not at all, dear. I advertised for a working partner who thoroughly understood engineering, and was English—I made that stipulation, simply because I hoped I might catch some fellow who was solitary over there, like myself."

"I see. It was a strange career for you to

choose, though, Arthur? Why did not you, if you must leave England——?”

“Why didn’t I, if I must leave England,” echoed Arthur, laughing at her tones, “go abroad, and idle away (in so-called pleasure) the best years of my life? In my hot anger with you, Margaret, I did not wait to select very deliberately, and it has turned out well. Steven, what do you think of this valley now?”

They had stopped to look around them, and the scene seemed beautiful to them all. The woods were brilliant and varied in their Autumn glory; the valley was rich with verdure and with harvest wealth, and through it the river ran glittering among the reeds and flowers; while, in the utter stillness, they fancied they could even *hear* the leaves touch the tremulous waters.

“There is no more picturesque or richly-cultivated spot on all the Kingswood estate,” said Arthur, as they stood, “than this valley where the Black Birches stood. Now let us canter to the bridge, or we shall not be among the first to offer our congratulations to the owners of—— By the way, I wonder whether they have fixed on a name for the estate; we must ask.”

From the smooth square lawn before the new house on the slope Luke Hawthorne and his wife watched their friends coming towards them, on that wide, curved road, the cutting of which, through his own land, had perhaps been the achievement which had given Mr. Hawthorne most delight of all.

"Michal, my dear," he cried, as the first visitors neared the summit, "it's one gigantic triumph of engineering on a domestic scale, and I don't know what to say that's jolly enough to express my feelings. 'Rule Britannia' doesn't do it, because I had jilted her when I found my good luck, and 'Hail Columbia' doesn't do it, because I had jilted her when I found my wife again. Could you suggest any exclamation in which the two ideas would be blended, my dear?"

"Perhaps, Luke," suggested Mrs. Hawthorne, looking pathetically up into her husband's face, as if aware he must be suffering a great deal, "if you were to say 'God save the Queen' a few times it might relieve you."

There was no further time for conjugal solace. In a few minutes, Mr. and Mrs. Hawthorne were the centre of the wondering and

admiring group of friends who had gathered to offer their cordial and sincere congratulations, and who, in earnest little clusters, were making fresh discoveries at every step. And perhaps the only quite unexpected discovery among all, was the grove of newly-planted birch trees which gave the old well-known name to the house.

When, after this investigation, they found lunch spread upon the lawn, and Mr. Hawthorne's two men-servants, quick and deft, waiting to serve it, the surprise was laughed over, as if the day had held no greater. But a greater was to follow—a less pleasant one too, though that fact never went beyond the thoughts of any there. They were still sitting round the table on the lawn when such a dazzling equipage came dashing up the new road, that it was some minutes before any of them recognised its occupant as Count Vehren's wife—Rose Levey no longer. True, her husband was also with her in the carriage—so showy, with its rose-coloured lining and its vivid blasonry—but his diminutive figure was almost lost in the huge corner near her. Two footmen, in pink and gold, sprang down when

the carriage stopped before the gate, and Rose, in gorgeous apparel, laid her hand upon one pink sleeve, and alighted with that slow languor essential to the maintainence of a lofty position. She was complacently aware of the lasting benefit she conferred on the owners of this new house by a few moments of her presence to-day, and a few words of soulless compliment, but (for fear this fact might not have been fully impressed upon them under ordinary circumstances) she had ensured a display which would secure her from the chance of rivalry, even if her worst fears should be realized, and the Monktons should have ordered full dress livery, and gone in their greatest style. How many qualms she would have been spared that morning if she could have seen Scot and Doris walking through the park, and up the sloping road, the wife's hand clinging to her husband's arm, as if that support were dearer to her than a footman's—even in pink and gold.

"I am glad you did not insist on our remaining, Rose," remarked Count Vehrens, with a fastidious shudder, as they drove back. "Certainly that appears to be a very perfect little

estate—stupid name though, the Black Birches—each part being appropriately finished and compact. But what a fatiguing person; one feels in honour bound to doubt the fact of his good birth. And then for the Squire of Kingswood to have personally assisted in this building, as well as that ex-Royal Artillery officer. Dear, dear, how your nation must be degenerating, love, to even *allow* such tastes in its *jeunesse dorée*—it distresses me. Tell me what you yourself think on this question; I have generally found your views commendable.”

“Oh! do try to be silent for one minute at a time,” muttered Rose, pettishly; “I’m tired.”

The Count subsided into a silence which was unusual, for, to do her justise, Rose rarely imposed it upon him, leisure for thought being unnecessary to her as a rule. But just now her thoughts were busy in avague discontent. As she drove homewards, in her gaudy Parisian costume, her brilliant equipage flashing in the sunshine, and her husband’s patents of wealth and nobility stamped on everything about her, there hovered before her possibilities of warmer feelings, and of higher purposes which life might hold; and, though they would fade in the next

excitement, just now they made her heart—poor Rose!—feel very void.

A little later on Mr. Levey rode up from Osborne House. It being thoroughly against his principles to be betrayed into any evidence of haste, he had postponed his visit until afternoon; but it being equally against his principles to neglect any opportunity of mingling with the “county families,” he had taken care to be in time.

Bernard was unaltered since the time when he had first begun to mould himself upon Scot Monkton's model. If possible, this modelling was more indefatigably pursued than ever, now that the Squire of Kingswood stood so firmly on the highest place in the county; but the difference between the two young men was greater even than it had ever been. Not possessing feelings fine enough to discern why Scot's manner had had an added kindliness, since he had himself won the wife whom Mr. Levey selected to woo, this kindliness had only added a pinnacle to the already lofty fabric of his self-importance; and the reason he was still unmarried was, not because his heart had been broken by Doris Egerton's refusal, but because (was he not the

brother-in-law of a Count?) he had made up his mind that a title would be a suitable appendage to the mistress of Osborne House. And so it naturally chanced that the suit he always coolly and complacently proposed, had not yet won any answer more encouraging than laughter or contempt. This constant succession of selection and pursuit might have its advantage in variety and excitement; but there seemed danger of a time coming when Bernard would find it safest to seek some one to whom the charms of a well-filled purse, and an ostentatious establishment, would have the *added* charm of novelty.

But at last there came up the sloping walk one solitary guest, whom everybody recognized with such a glad, spontaneous shout of welcome, that when he heard it he looked up and paused one moment, as if the pleasure of such a greeting touched upon pain. And when they went beyond the open gate to meet him, and seized his hands so warmly—some the right and some the left—it was little wonder that the old lawyer uttered his words just then more curtly even than of old.

Then they had to lead him over the new

model house and farm, and, though he took keen interest in all Luke Hawthorne said, and asked shrewd questions of Arthur Egerton, it was at Scot's side he liked to find himself. And, though he had congratulations for Mrs. Hawthorne, and pleasant jests for Margaret and Miss Joan, it was Doris's hand he liked to feel within his arm, and it was down into her bright; raised face he liked to look.

The pleasant afternoon was nearly over, when Doris—who had been loitering with Steven Chamberlain among the foreign birds in Mr. Hawthorne's aviary, where he himself was now patiently entertaining Steven with their various habits and acquirements—met Mr. Bradford alone for the first time. She joined him with a smile of pleasure, and stood beside him at the new engine-house.

"I cannot help thinking so much to-day," she said, presently, in her gentle, winning way, "of my own plans, Mr. Bradford. They have not even been begun, while all these are finished. Still, as you have promised some day to make them clear and practicable for me, I have no fear. But happiness always makes me think so much of Kenneth, and sometimes my thoughts feel

almost like *his* thoughts. When may it be? I've thought that if there were one large, comfortable, quiet club-house, in grounds of its own, that there might be utter silence, and yet trees and grass and flowers—and not too far from town, of course—and where only those who find it hard to win their livelihood by their pen, may—by paying just a little, you know, to make them feel——”

“They’ll feel nothing but laziness,” put in the old lawyer, testily. “We shall be overrun with scribblers.”

“But—” pleaded Doris, looking up in surprise, as if she felt the old man’s looks would belie his words.

“It can’t be done,” he resumed, conclusively, “until that house at Richmond is empty.”

“Your house, Mr. Bradford! Are you going to——”

“And that house at Richmond,” he continued, unmoved, “won’t be empty until T. & C. Bradford have won their last case. Tears, my little girl! I know you are in no hurry for the house, but you will find your plans all made easy for you then. I shall make them easy for you, dear; not for your sake, alone, but for—my boy’s. But old as I am, I can—

not rust out, Doris. I must wear out—as my boy did. Ah! at last, there's little Kenneth.”

“Yes. Mr. Hawthorne made us promise that even *he* should come here this first day,” said Doris, with gentleness, as she noticed how tenderly the old man uttered her baby's name; “but we thought he must not arrive too early, to disturb anyone. Nurse took him to Anna Wakeley's cottage; it is a favourite resort of hers, and Anna is fond of baby.”

“I suppose she leads a peaceful life there now?”

“Yes; it is even a happy one. Scot has given her the cottage for her life, and she gets so much work to do that she lives very comfortably; and I think everybody is fond of Anna. Of course, she could never have loved her husband, you know.”

“Think not? Didn't Wakeley strike you as a loveable person?”

“Listen,” cried Doris, laughing; “they are calling us. Oh! Mr. Bradford, isn't it nice to see papa and Arthur together? Certainly they *do* seem more like brothers than father and son; but then”—with a thoughtful air which was not free from pride—“it's all the better, I

think, because Scot is so like papa's son. And isn't Margaret happy? And did you hear Steven laughing with me just now? And——"

"Doris, my dear," interposed Mr. Bradford, with great solemnity, "I miss our hostess. Do you think she has run away from her husband again?"

It was Scot who found his aunt at last, sitting behind an ample laurel in a distant corner of the lawn, rocking herself in a low garden-chair and crying placidly.

"What is it, Aunt Michal?" he asked, surprised and anxious. "Has anything distressing occurred to-day—of all days? Why do you cry?"

"Because—why, because," she sobbed, as if the answer to such a question ought to have been self-evident, "it is so—so enjoyable—my dear."

* * * * *

The rich light of that evening sunset glides softly into the long library at Kingswood; while the frescoed gods and goddesses, warm and ruddy in its glow, look down upon its sole occupant, as they looked one other evening long ago, when he had fancied that he sat there for the last time.

Beautiful and dear as his home had been to him when looking bravely forward, he had left

it at what he felt to be the call of duty, it is far more beautiful and far more cherished now. Handsome and happy as the young Squire had been on that day we first saw him lying back in this very chair, with his cornet in his hand, he is a far handsomer and happier man to-day. His life had never been a life of show and pomp—his nature was both too thorough and too earnest for that—but it is a life now which carries a wide influence for good; and while his name is widely known, and his thoughts valued on all national and public questions, his staunch support is ever on the side of right; and when that right seems hard to follow, he is all the better an adviser, friend, or master, from having known what poverty means, and from having been—what he still is proud to call himself, for he understands the wide meaning of the term—*a working man*.

In many a private way, outside the world of politics and public life, he finds it easy to help his fellow-men, and there are times when Lewis Raine comes down to Kingswood with intelligence of some poor fellow who, in his despair, has tried to seek out Mr. Albert Mostyn—the house in Duke Street knows Mr. Mostyn no more—or such as he. And in such case of need

—for Raine brings no word of cases which are not real cases of need—the gift or simple loan, without a thought of interest, passes, through Raine or Mr. Bradford, to the man whose trouble Scot can understand so well.

None of these thoughts are passing through his mind to-day. His mental gaze has not travelled beyond the walls of his own home, when he takes up his cornet and begins to play. As he plays, Doris enters the room, and comes softly up behind him with their baby in her arms.

Within a few yards of the low chair—where Monarch sits beside his master just as he did on that first day we saw him, three years ago—she stops, raising her finger to baby with a gesture of silence which she believes to be fully comprehended, and obeyed, by that marvellous infant. It is a pretty picture—the mother's eyes brimming over with laughter, as her desire to keep her baby silent, does battle with her pride in the incomprehensible springs and thrusts which she translates into a perfect appreciation of his father's music.

"I'm sure," she says, when Scot leaves off, and she comes softly up and sits beside him, turning to him a face so pretty in its utter

happiness, "that little Kenneth will be a great musician, Scot."

"Not a doubt of it. I understand he is to be in every way the greatest man of his age. Of course I'm very proud to know it, but my one hope for him—always swallowing every other—is that he shall be as happy a man as his father. Can that be possible, though, my own dear wife, unless—near or far off—a little Doris will presently appear."

"Just play one tune and try, Scot," Doris says, demurely; "while you hold him yourself, for he will be sent for in a minute."

Scot plays a few bars, his eyes full of laughter as his boy's tiny hand is thrust into his beard.

"You see," says Doris, with great gravity. "That shows how he likes it."

"I see," rejoins Scot, with still greater gravity. "That punch he gave me shows how he likes it."

"Do you notice his hair, Scot?" inquires Doris, still declining to be betrayed into a smile on this subject, and surreptitiously ruffling the short locks upwards as she speaks; he will have just your own curls."

"That won't do. How am I to get on without them?"

"Really, Scot," his young wife says, leaning her bright head on his shoulder, "if I didn't know you so well, I might think you were quite calm about baby. But then" (with a bright low laugh) "I *do* know you, you see. And besides that," she adds, with sudden tenderness in her tone, "I can always remember your love for little Willy."

"Doris, my darling," Scot says, as his eyes meet hers, in their great warmth of love and pride, "dearly as I grew to love that little lonely fellow, this love is different. Except yourself, my own beloved, the world holds nothing half so dear; and I wonder whether you will ever quite know how much I love you."

"Do you think," she answers, smiling brightly into his earnest eyes, "that it is hard to understand a feeling so entirely my own? I know your love for me, by my own love for you, dear husband."

"I wonder," Scot says, presently, when baby has been carried away, while still Doris lingers at his side, "why my thoughts have been so busy with old times while I have sat here this evening waiting for you?"

"Because there has been such a gathering to-day, and because we are to meet here again

to-night. I am so glad you thought of that, Scot. It will be such a pleasant ending of the day."

"I thought of it, eh? But I wasn't musing exactly of the pleasantest of the old times, I'm ashamed to say. I was recalling one day when I sat here, just as I do now, and they brought me word a gentleman wished to see the picture gallery. That 'gentleman' was Monsieur Sourdets, Doris, and he was then prosecuting his search for the original of the photograph he carried."

"And, when the thought was over, you found me here instead," Doris says, brightly. "Stay one moment, Scot, please—don't interrupt me yet. Talking of Monsieur Sourdets as a gentleman reminds me, too, of something belonging to old times. You won't remember it, of course?"

"Certainly not, if it touches upon you. I remember nothing of that kind."

"You won't remember—probably," amends Doris; "but it was one day I sat by the river waiting for Kenneth, and you came with him from the Black Birches, and asked me what I was thinking of; and I read you a few lines of Hare's, describing what a real gentleman should be. I wasn't quite open about that, Scot. It was you I had been thinking of, and how little

your busy life had changed you; and the words fitted in of themselves to the thought—only it luckily happened that I had just read them, and so I could say so. But I remember you spoke rather strangely about it all, as if you knew nothing about such feelings. You often did speak so to me, Scot, I used to fancy.”

“Did you?” he asks, quite coolly, while he bends to kiss her with great tenderness. “I have some recollection of those times—faint, of course, as you so correctly insinuate,—and I think, some day, beloved, that you may possibly understand what puzzled you then. Not quite immediately, but—let me see—when Kenneth grows up, perhaps, and tells his mother his love secrets. Ah! what a blush! Did you not know, my darling, how I loved you even then? and how, in every word you said, I felt—My precious wife, look up again, with that truthful light within your eyes. I will not pain you by a word. I have no more old days to recall; I will explain no more cold words. I will just read my own love-story where now it is so clear to me; and—as Aunt Michal says—‘that’s all.’”

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THE END.



